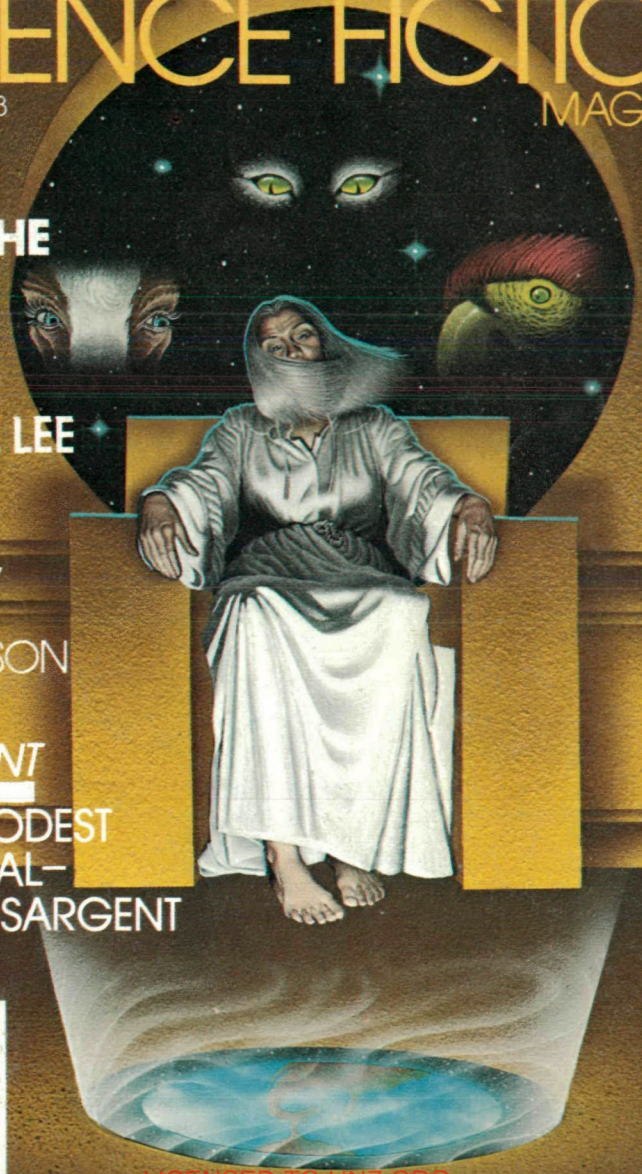
# Isaac ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

1.75 MAY 1983



TALES FROM THE NET: A FAMILY MATTER
RAND B. LEE

LEIGH KENNEDY

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*VIEWPOINT*

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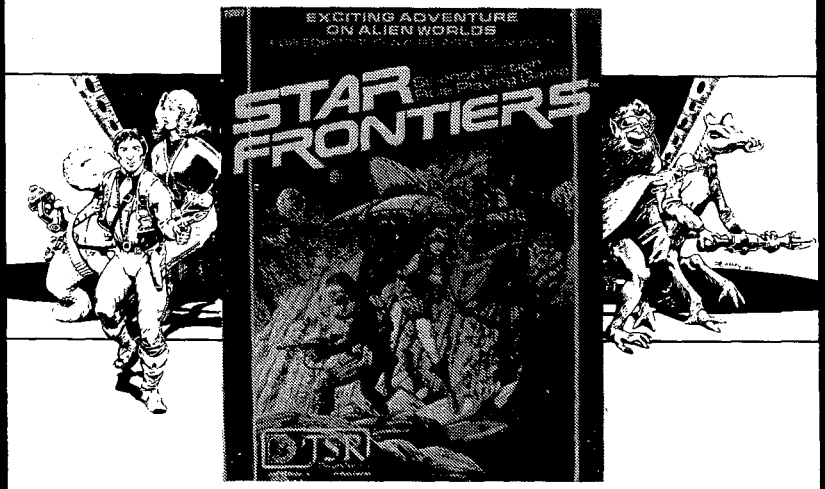


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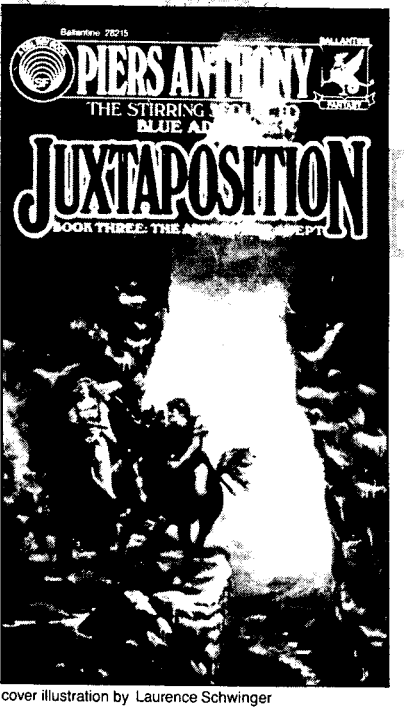


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# EDITORIAL

## BEST-SELLER

by Isaac Asimov

In the December 1982 issue of this magazine, you may recall that the first two chapters of my novel, *Foundation's Edge,* were presented as an excerpt, together with an essay of my own on the novel's genesis and some pleasant comments from my friends and colleagues. I agreed to all this under strong pressure from the editorial staff, who thought it would be a Good Thing and who overrode my own objections that readers would complain that I was using the magazine for personal aggrandizement.

As it happened, my fears were groundless. Readers' comments were generally friendly, and a gratifying number indicated their determination to get the book and finish reading it.

It may be that you are curious to know what happened after the book was published. (For those of you interested in Asimovian trivia, it was published on October 8, 1982.) I'd like to tell you, because what happened astonished me totally. The book proved to be a best-seller!

I don't mean it was a "best-seller" in the usual publisher's-promotion way of indicating that it didn't actually sink without a trace on publication day. I mean it appeared on the national best-seller lists and, as I write, it is in third place on both *The New York Times* and on the *Publishers Weekly* list of hard-cover fiction. Maybe by the time this editorial appears, it will have disappeared from the lists, but *right now* it's there.

In the past, in these editorials, I have promised to keep you up to date on my endeavors and I will do it now in the form of an invented interview:

*Q. Dr. Asimov, is this your first best-seller?*

A. For some reason, people find that hard to believe, perhaps because I'm so assiduous at publicizing myself, but *Foundation's Edge is* my first best-seller. It is my 262nd book and I have been a professional writer for 44 years, so I guess this qualifies me as something less than an overnight success.

Mind you, this is not my first



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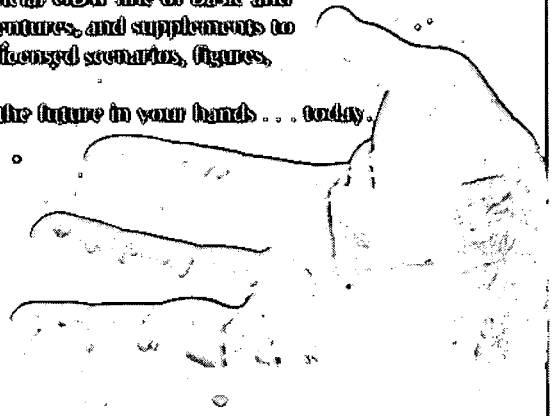

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Chicago, for instance. And it makes me feel guilty, and a traitor both to my publisher and my book. I *have* made a trip to Philadelphia, though.

There is also a higher than normal demand for interviews through visits or on the telephone. This doesn't demand traveling on my part and I try to oblige (telling myself it's good publicity for the book), but it does cut into my writing time, and I can't allow too much of that.

Then, too, there's an extraordinary demand for free copies. This is a common disease among writers' friends and relations, who feel that there is no purpose in knowing a writer if you have to help support him. My dear wife (J. O. Jeppson), who is a shrewd questioner, has discovered the astonishing fact that some people think writers get unlimited numbers of free copies to give out. They don't! Except for a certain very small number, they have to *buy* copies just as anyone else does. (Even if they did have unlimited numbers of free copies, giving them rather than selling them would ruin a writer, just as giving meat rather than selling it would ruin a butcher.)

What I have done is to resist firmly any temptation to hand out *Foundation's Edge*. I have told everyone they must buy copies at a bookstore. If they insist, I will give them copies


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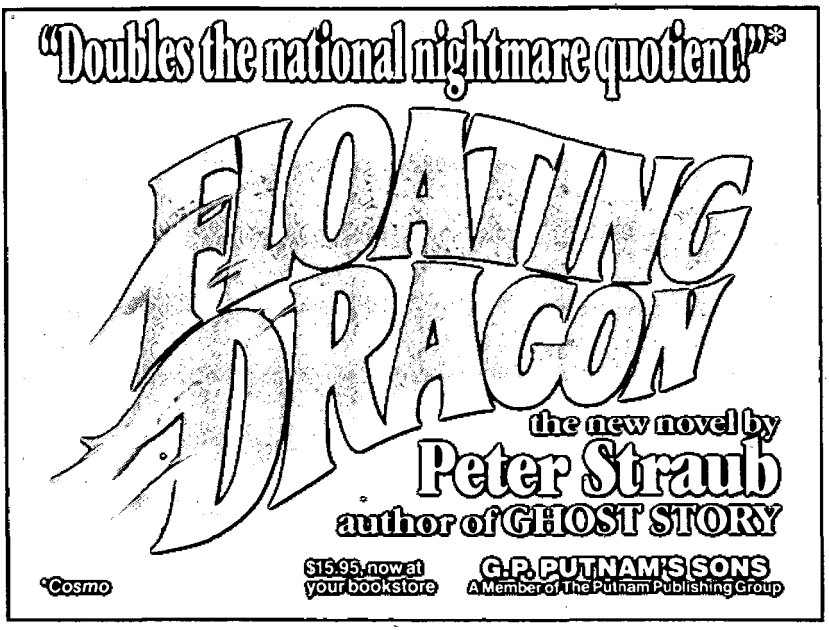


of other books, but those sales of *Foundation's Edge* must be registered. Every little bit helps.

*Q. Do you see any importance in this situation aside from personal profit and gratification?*

A. I do, indeed. Soon after *Foundation's Edge* was published, Arthur C. Clarke's new novel, *2010: Odyssey Two* was published, and it hit the best-seller lists, too. At the moment of writing it is in fifth place on *The New York Times* list. Earlier this year, Robert A. Heinlein made the list with *Friday* and Frank Herbert did so with *White Plague.*

I think this is the first year in which four different science fiction writers made the lists with straight science fiction books. I also think that in the case of Clarke and myself, this is the first time straight science fiction has landed so high on the lists.

This is gratifying to me as a long time science fiction fan. It indicates to me that, finally, science fiction is coming to be of interest to the general public and not simply to those few who inhabit the SF "ghetto."

In fact, I wish to point this out to those SF writers who are bitter and resentful because they feel that their books are shoved into the background and disregarded merely because they have the SF label on them. Neither *Foundation's Edge* nor


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*2010: Odyssey Two* makes any effort to hide the fact that it is science fiction. The publishers' promotion in each case utterly fails to obscure that fact. In the case of *Foundation's Edge, The New York Times* carefully describes it as "science fiction" each week in its best-seller listing. And yet it continues to sell.

To be sure, there is a trace of the "ghetto" just the same. There is one thing that Arthur and I have in common, aside from best-selling books. As of the moment of writing, neither *Foundation's Edge* nor *2010: Odyssey Two* has been reviewed in *The New York Times.* I presume the paper hesitates to bestow that accolade on mere science fiction. Oh, well!

*Q. And what are your present projects, Isaac?*

A. Well, Doubleday has informed me, in no uncertain terms, that I am condemned to write one novel after another for life, and that I am not permitted to consider dying.

So I am working on another novel. This one is to be the third novel of the "robot" series. Both Lije Baley and R. Daneel will reappear, and will complete the trilogy that began with *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun.* The third novel is called *World of the Dawn.*

After that, I am afraid that Doubleday expects me to do a fifth Foundation novel; and, apparently, so do the readers. For three decades they badgered me for a sequel to the *Foundation Trilogy* and when I gave that to them, the ungrateful dogs responded by badgering me for a sequel to the sequel.

I'd complain, except that I love it.

Note: On December 19, 1982, *The New York Times* finally reviewed *Foundation's Edge,* and very favorably too. On that day, the book had slipped to sixth place in the best-seller list (still not bad) but Clarke had climbed to second place. ●

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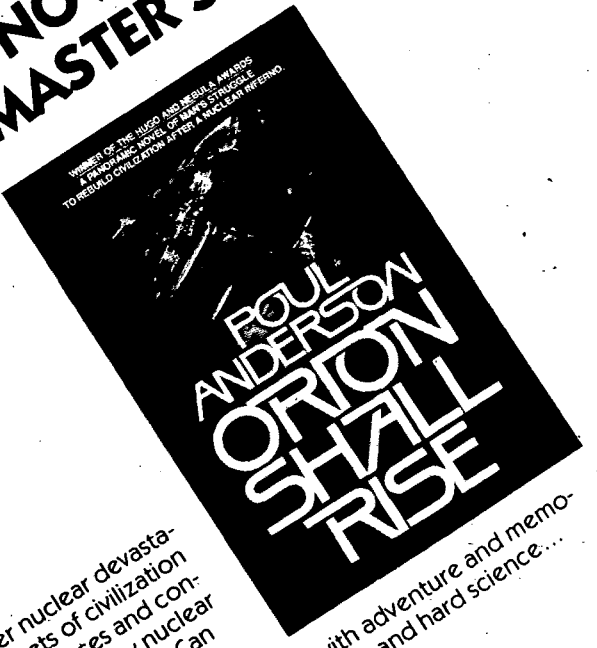
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# LETTERS

Dear Isaac Asimov,

I am not in the habit of writing to periodicals, but I am obviously making an exception in this case. Your (and now my) November issue is the pinnacle of the magazine's history. I have just finished reading David Brin's "The Postman" and I am riding a wave of intellectual satisfaction. I read for enjoyment, plain and simple. Mr. Brin's story has far surpassed my requirements for exceptional writing. Bravo, Mr. Brin, bravo.

As for the magazine in general, John W. Campbell Jr. would have been proud to be associated with a magazine of this caliber. Please keep up the incredible work you are doing.

In parting, there is only one drawback I am facing. I feel so elated that I promised to take my family out to dinner. (I plead temporary emotional instability.)

Peter Klopsis
Holbrook, NY

Dear Editors:

Let me applaud all the members of your staff for their excellent efforts in producing an exceptional magazine month after month. Its arrival in the mail usually creates pleasant anticipation of good entertainment (unless my husband and I get into an argument over who gets to read it first).

The main purpose of this letter however, is to request that you please ask David Brin if he would consider writing more stories (a series) about *The Postman*. Of all the stories I have read, this one, for whatever reason, really struck a responsive chord in me and I would love to see more of the same.

One further comment before signing off for those who write to complain about the new cover art or works of certain authors. Please keep an open mind. Not everyone likes the same things. If they did, it sure would be a BORING world to live in.

Thanks for hearing me out.

Pat Kolasinski
Watertown, WI

*It seems to me that "The Postman" is receiving more enthusiastic comments than any item we've published since "Enemy Mine."*

*—Isaac Asimov*

To whom it may concern:

I have long respected your publication, and I still do, at least from the standpoint of a reader. As a writer, I have always carried a cheerful chip on my shoulder because I have always been rejected by your editorial staff. This chip remained cheerful because I could always count on some handy, non-



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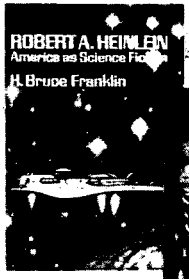

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specific guidelines to tell me what I had not done, had overdone, or just plain done wrong.

But my grudge is about to shift into a more unpleasant gear. I just tried submitting again after over a year and, while I have no objection to speedily returned, rejected manuscripts, it absolutely *galls* me to receive a featureless and uninformative note of fifty words or less from a magazine that I always had been led to believe was the *friend* of the struggling writer! Perhaps you have made some provision for this insulting state of affairs in some newer manuscript requirements than the information to which I have been referring. Please send me an outline of your current requirements that I may judge for myself.

Still in shock,

Alan K. Lipton
Berkeley, CA

*We are your friend, but please calculate how many words per rejection can be written if we consider the hundreds of stories (850, to be reasonably exact. SM) we receive every month, and divide the time it takes to read and consider all of them by the amount of time that exists. Please be reasonable.*

*—Isaac Asimov*

Dear Staff:

I am a thirty-eight-year-old woman. I have one husband and one fifteen-year-old son (my subscription was a gift from him). I work part time as a clerk to support my primary hobby of raising, training, and competing with purebred Saint Bernards. I have slightly more than a high school education, I have been reading science fiction for about twenty-five years and I am not, nor do I intend to become, a professional writer.

I work hard and I play hard. When I sit down to read I am concerned only with being entertained while I relax. In other words, I am looking for a *good* story.

It can be hard science fiction, soft science fiction, or out and out fantasy. It can be any sort of blend for that matter. I don't care as long as it catches my interest and gives me something to think about while I unwind. I read for my own enjoyment and frankly I think all this wrangling about what kind of stories should be published under the by-line Science Fiction is pretty silly.

It's your magazine—publish whatever you like. If I don't like a story I don't have to read it and if you publish too many that I don't like I will cancel my subscription. Just like TV, folks—you can always change the channel.

Personally, I enjoy most of your stories and for every one that hasn't thrilled me there is at least one I plan to reread many times. I think you have been serving up a fine blend of entertainment and I hope you don't change the recipe too much.

Of the new features, I enjoy the Profile, Upfront, and Mooney's Module. I also look forward to the Good Doctor's Editorials and Letters. I enjoy the book reviews even when I disagree but I could do with less poetry. I don't like the Puzzles at all (my mind doesn't work that way) but my husband reads and enjoys them. If there have been any



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puns in the last couple of issues, I have missed them and although I hate to admit it, I would like to have them back.

I am glad that you are publishing so many new authors. I am too cheap to willingly part with the money for a book by someone I have never read before. Now I have a growing list of people I feel confident about.

I enjoy your magazine a great deal and you will find my request for an extended subscription enclosed.

Jerri Hobbs

*Dear Jerri, if we had a hundred thousand readers exactly like you, we'd all know we were dead and in science fiction heaven.*

*—Isaac Asimov*

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Let me first establish my credentials: I have been reading your writings since Day One: I hate writing letters. Perhaps the above two statements may prevent you tearing this screed up out of hand.

My problem was to start this letter in such a way as to convince you instantly that I have neither any designs on your pocket-book nor am I attempting to get anything published. Having, hopefully, succeeded in this, let us proceed.

When a scientist, back in the nineteenth century, did a projection on the future of transport, he came to the conclusion that by 1950 the streets of London would be thigh-deep in horse-manure. This, of course, did not happen. Mainly because, at the critical time, along came Messrs. Otto, Benz, and Daimler. They transferred the pollution from our shoes to our nostrils.

If they could have foreseen at the time, the effect on the atmosphere that the endless proliferation of their inventions would have . . . would they have stopped, and thought again? I think not! The tendency always, is to lumber our descendants with the problems we cannot solve. And we are now approaching another forking of the ways . . . and I am very much afraid that we are going to take the fork that commits us to the solar power satellites for future energy requirements.

At first, everything will be lovely. The U.S. of A. will put up the first two or three of these new devices, and the energy-rich microwaves will stream inexhaustibly down. If the receiving stations are properly sited, there will be no danger of us being cooked by microwaves . . . the problem is, we may end up being cooked anyway! The rest of the world is not going to allow the U.S. to establish a monopoly on cheap energy. Every tinpot nation that can cobble up an ability to limp into space is going to be out there, a-building; and the combined collector area facing the Sun is going to proliferate out of sight!

Even if the total received energy is used at maximum efficiency (which is highly unlikely), it will make no difference. It will all, eventually, end up degraded to the same thing . . . HEAT!

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tiplied, what then? It will still find a new balance, but at a higher surface temperature. The new temperature may not, at first, be high enough to liquefy the surface rocks, but it sure as shooting *will* be high enough to melt ice . . . and I can't tread water for ever!

There! I've got it off my chest!

I can make quite a lot of noise locally, through various science fiction and technical magazines; but South Africa is not likely to be consulted before the first of these menaces is launched. On the other hand, the technical population of America *will* be asked . . . and in America you are a respected figure whose voice may be heard. . . . Perhaps if you were to raise the point; or at least write a story around the subject that would make the Technocrats think before they plunge, your grandchildren and mine may avoid the Heat-Death of Earth.

Neville Cutler
Redhill, Durban,
South Africa

P.S. It wasn't just soft-soap when I said I had read just about everything you have ever published . . . and I *did* enjoy doing so!

*Whenever I talk about the establishment of a space-centered society, I always stress the fact that it must be a global effort or it won't work. Every "tinpot" nation is a collection of human beings, and it must be done as "humanity" and not as "nations."*

*—Isaac Asimov*

Editor, *IAsfm*

Wonderful profile of Stephen Jay

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Gould in your November issue. Your biographer missed a little bit, though. Gould has written that because the concept of IQ, and of the hereditary component of it, can be abused, there should be no research into genetic aspects of intelligence, and there should be no IQ testing. As a Marxist, he is required to follow the party line that human behavior is completely determined by the social environment, regardless of any research indications to the contrary. Dr. Gould does not seem to present the kind of example *IAsfm* ought to be offering to its readers—I thought SF represented the ultimate in open-mindedness. The point is not whether there should be IQ testing, or whether any part of human intelligence is in the genes; the point is one's readiness to accept research results, wherever they may lead, *and* one's willingness to permit research into any and every field.

I suppose your devotion of so many pages to Gould indicates an attitude toward him that will prevent any criticism from appearing.

Rinehart S. Potts
Glassboro, NJ

*Frankly, if we were committed to support Gould, by fair means or foul, the best thing we could do would be to print letters with criticisms of this calibre.*

*—Isaac Asimov*

Dear Editors:

Just to add some weight to this letter, I want to say that I'm not a novice fan. I was weaned on science fiction and my father was totally absorbed by it since its first stages. I am a second-generation reader.

I put off reading the first two chapters of *Foundation's Edge* in this magazine because it was only a sample. I told myself: "There won't be an ending, I'll be left unsatisfied. How can I get involved again in only the first two chapters?"

Unfortunately, the pages flew by too fast to make them last. I've read the trilogy in its entirety and only now can I see the horror in having this spellbinding writing appear in installments, as the original "Foundation" did. The piece was fantastic. Such intense characterization! Incredible drama! Beautiful flowing style! Congratulations to Dr. Asimov, he has done it again. I daresay he improves with age.

My only regret is that now I have to buy the book. I'm stuck waiting until my funds allow it. I could never get by with a paperback copy. I know this is truly a great work of art.

Kim A. Duic
1112 Echo Circle
Racine, WI 53406

*Actually, that is the purpose of an excerpt of this type; to drive you mad with an ineradicable yearning to read the whole thing. I hope I do improve with age, but I will have to wait until I age before I can be sure.*

*—Isaac Asimov*

Dear *IAsfm*, and those responsible for "On Books" in particular:

Arrggh!

I refer to the review of *Erasmus Magister*, by Charles Sheffield, on page 16 of your December issue.



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I don't know who is responsible, Baird Searles or some anonymous typesetter or proofreader; I don't know if it's a simple typo or a real misconception; but the man's name was not James Watts!

It's Watt, W-A-T-T, with no S at the end. Like the current Secretary of the Interior (not that I'm particularly proud to be associated with him), or like my mother's maiden name.

This is a matter of family pride for me. I am distantly related to James Watt (tea kettles); I am not, so far as I know, related to anybody named Watts. The two names are not the same family at all. I resent seeing so notable a relative consigned, time after time, to the other bloodline. It's a common mistake; I had hoped that with the prominence of the aforementioned cabinet officer it might fade away, as people became aware of the existence of the name sans S, but apparently it hasn't happened that way.

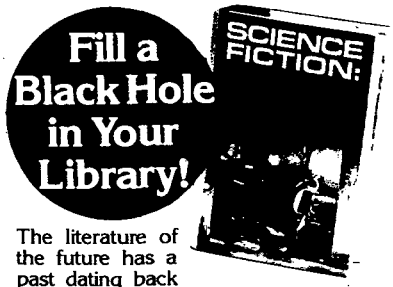
I had hoped for better from *IAsfm.*

Lawrence Watt-Evans
Lexington, KY

P.S. If anyone cares, the Watt family is a branch of Clan Buchanan; I don't know who the Watts family might be, historically.

*I sympathize with you. I have a great deal of trouble with the letter "s" myself. In my first name, it is frequently doubled; in my last, it is replaced by a "z" now and then. Consequently, you may be sure that we will search out the villain and make blood-curdling faces at him.*

*—Isaac Asimov*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# MARTIN GARDNER

## RUN, ROBOT, RUN!

A few centuries from now a young man was walking his robot dog, Farfel, through Central Park, in Manhattan. There was a November chill in the air, and a thin blanket of snow lay on the ground.

When the man reached the park's reservoir he stopped to set Farfel's trotting speed at 10 mph. Then he took from his pocket a small rubber ball.

"While I circle the reservoir," he said to the dog, "I'll keep tossing the ball. I want you to fetch it each time and bring it back. Understand?"

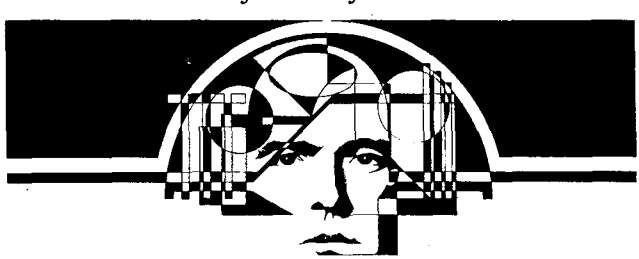
"I understand," said Farfel, wagging his tail.

As he walked around the reservoir, the man thought: "Farfel's battery is getting low and I'd like to make it last as long as possible. The greater the distance he covers, the more current he uses. If I want to minimize the distance he runs, should I toss the ball ahead of me, or throw it backward along the path, or off to the side away from the water?" It was a perplexing question.

Assume that the man walked at a constant speed of 5 mph, the dog trotted at a constant speed of 10 mph, and neither dog nor man paused during their trip around the reservoir. Assume also that the man and dog started together, and were together when the man completed his circuit.

How should the man toss the ball so as to minimize the distance covered by the dog? Ahead, behind, or to one side? And does it matter whether he throws the ball a short distance or far away?

Think about it carefully before you check the answer on page 55.





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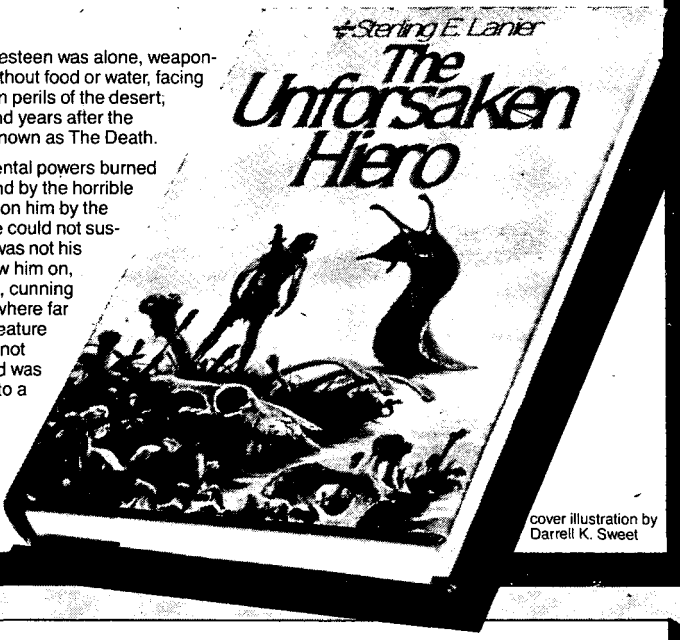


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# IAsfm Puzzle #10, by Merl H. Reagle

# ILLUSTRATED MEN

## ACROSS

1 Terhune's dog
4 Lester —— Rey
7 Craft in "Star Trek, The Motion Picture"
11 Run
13 Word in a Sagan title
15 In a pique
16 Saturated
17 Modern bombers/Reveal
19 Fr. wine/Coin/Princess/Destiny
21 Al Jolson's real first name
22 Zaire's President Mobutu —— Seko
23 Certain missiles
26 Alway
27 York, e.g.
29 One of 500 for Bartholomew Cubbins
30 Bit of wind/Prayer word/Music notes
35 —— F (gas-tank span)
36 Slithery predators
37 "Am ——?" (classic torch song)
38 Word base for a planet
39 Fabulous bird, now extinct
40 Drink/"Picture of health"/Wk. day/500
42 Ref. book
43 Generator: abbr.
44 Howard Carter's 1922 discovery
45 Singer Della
47 The players
49 Ph.D.'s relative
52 Footfall/Bird/"Terrif"/Fleming
56 South Carolina/Hat
58 John ——, star of "Eraserhead"
59 "The Boy With Green ——"
60 "Brain from Planet Arous" star
61 Out-of-this-world outfit
62 See
63 "Peg — Heart"
64 Compass Point

## DOWN

1 Dr. Ransom's creator
2 Capital of Guam
3 UFO shape
4 Budget headaches
5 Orchestra conductor — Waart
6 German director Riefenstahl
7 Italian actress Monica
8 Ulysses, for one
9 River shocker
10 Initials of author of *The Myth of Mental Illness*
11 Extremely hot production?
12 Nemo's milieu
14 Clock shaped like a ship
18 Health, to Henri
20 With courage
24 How the actors end up in "Little Shop of Horrors"
25 "The Day the Earth — Still"
26 Aliens
27 Like some grapes
28 Genre classics, for short
30 Puzzle freak
31 Major Amer. highway
32 Luna, in "Destination Moon"
33 Nickname for Scrooge
34 Half MCXX

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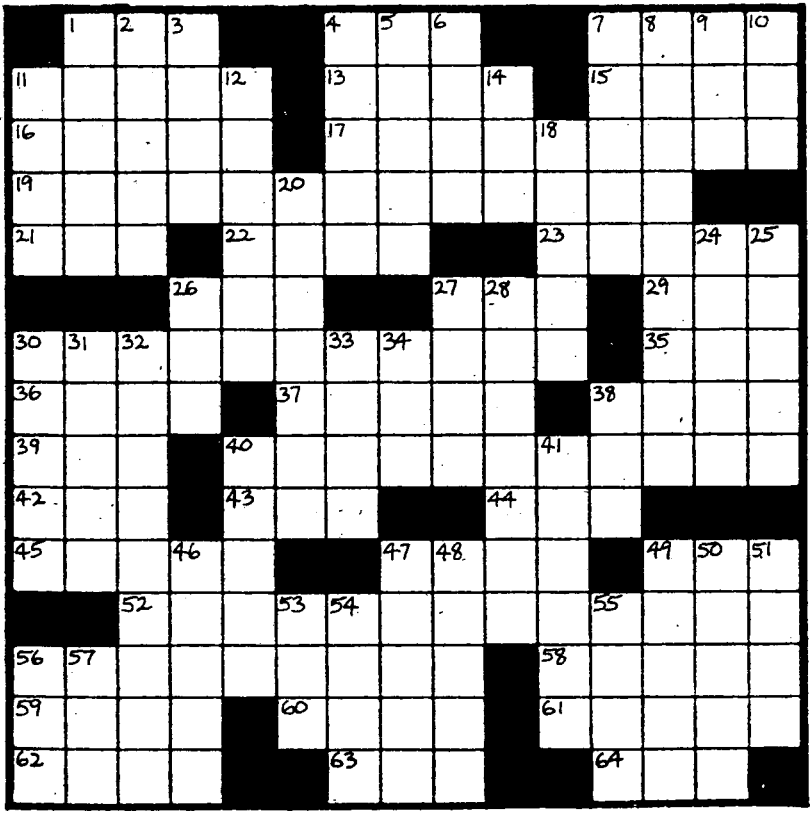
Solution on page 165

**38** Total: abbr.
**40** Revoke, in legalese
**41** "Looking Beyond" author Lin
**46** *IAsfm* offering
**47** W. Pacific sea
**48** "— Red Planet"
**49** Word in countdowns
**50** Prima —
**51** Perform without —
**53** Bowlers' assn.
**54** Award for 28 Down
**55** What Edwards is
**56** Haggard heroine
**57** Instance, in St. Lô



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# GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

They're creative. They're bizarre. They're unique. You might say some of them are even disgusting. All these adjectives accurately describe gaming miniatures—the small soldiers, characters, and creatures cast in metal and used in role-playing games.

SF and fantasy miniatures are either 15 or 25 millimeters in scale (that's about an inch tall for a male or female character; monsters are usually larger).

In a role-playing game, you play a specific character, be it a wizard, a thief, a warrior, a superhero, a spy, a detective, or whatever. A miniature figure serves as a three-dimensional representation of your character in the game and it's placed on the table along with the other adventures' character-figures in your group. As encounters take place between characters and monsters controlled by the Game Master or referee and the players' characters, these figures are placed on the table as well to physically represent the action.

Since each player wants to have a unique figure, he can choose one or more from among dozens of each type of character or creature available from several manufacturers. It's not unusual for a gamer to play a variety of characters, a different one in each game. A goal of many rpgamers is to assemble a collection of minatures, representing different characters in different poses.

Miniatures are made of either metal alloy or paper. Cast metal figures make up the vast majority available today, but the paper kind, which come printed in full color, ready to use, have found a niche with gamers who may not want the chore of painting metal figures.

There are about two dozen manufacturers in the U.S. that produce SF, fantasy, or historical miniatures, and another six British lines are imported through small stores or through distributors. Some of the biggest and best known companies in the SF and fantasy areas are listed below.

**Castle Creations,** 1322 Cranwood Sq. South, Columbus, Oh 43229, manufactures "The Age of Condor" 25mm fantasy figures, as well as a line of "Super Spies," heroes for *The Super Hero Adventure Game,* and figures for Fantasy Games Unlimited's *Space Opera* SF role-playing game.

**Citadel Miniatures US Inc.,** Box 12352, Cincinnati, OH 45212, casts both SF and fantasy miniatures in 25mm scale, including historical figures such as medievals which can be used in fantasy games.

**DragonTooth Inc.,** 152 W. 26th St. #36, New York, NY 10001, makes a very creative line of 25mm fantasy personalities, demons, giants, dragons, and other "marvelous beasties."

**Grenadier Models Inc.,** Box 305, Springfield, PA 19064, is the largest miniatures manufacturers, making the official 15mm figures

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for Game Designers' Workshop's *Traveller*® SF role-playing game, vehicles for Steve Jackson Games' *Ogre* and *Car Wars* SF games, and 25mm size figures for *The Dark Crystal, Star Trek,* Chosium's *Call of Cthulhu* and *Worlds of Wonder* role-playing games, plus their own "Fantasy Lords," "Secret Agents" and "Gangsters" miniatures.

**Martian Metals,** Box 778, Cedar Park, TX 78613, manufactures, as their name implies, SF figures (in 15mm scale), as well as 25mm fantasy miniatures in their *DragonSlayers*® line.

**RAFM Company,** 19 Concession St., Cambridge, Ontario, Canada N1R 2G6 have their own lines of 25mm fantasy and SF in "The Royal Armies of the Hyborean Age" and "Strike Team Alpha," respectively. RAFM also makes the Ral Partha and Citadel US figures under license in Canada.

**Ral Partha Enterprises Inc.,** 5938 Carthage Court, Cincinnati, OH 45212 has won more awards for their figures than any other miniatures maker. Among their best: 25mm fantasy in "Fantasy Collector Series," "Personalities," "Children of the Night," and 15mm size "Armies of Myth and Legend" and "Star Warriors" SF figures.

**Steve Jackson Games,** Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760, is the only firm that makes paper miniatures, called "Cardboard Heroes." 15mm size figures are done for GDW's *Traveller*® game, as well as 25mm ones for FGU's *Villains and Vigilantes* superhero role-playing game. Generic fantasy characters and creatures are also available in the "Cardboard Heroes" series.

**Superior Models,** 2600 Philadelphia Pike, Box 99, Claymont, DE 19703, casts a 25mm fantasy line called "Wizards & Lizards."

**TSR Hobbies Inc.,** Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147, will have out their own line of 25mm figures for their *Dungeons & Dragons*® fantasy role-playing game in 1983.

**Task Force Games,** 1110 N. Fillmore, Amarillo, TX 79107, makes a line of metal starship miniatures called "Starline 2200" for use with their *Star Fleet Battles* game, or any SF tabletop battles in space.


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We wonder, can she possibly be *serious*?

# VIEWPOINT

# IN THE TRADITION OF: AN IMMODEST PROPOSAL

art: Judy Mitchell

by Pamela Sargent

The author's new novel, *The Alien Upstairs*, came out in February from Doubleday, and her young adult novel, *Earthseed*, is due any day from Harper & Row. Her work has appeared in *Twilight Zone* magazine, *F&SF*, and, of course, here.

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# VIEWPOINT

There has been little cause for cheer among working writers lately. One hears tales of unsold (or worse, unwritten) novels, of low advances, of poor and declining sales. Experienced writers who are not yet widely known have difficulty making a living; new writers are fortunate if they can sell a book at all.

Yet at the same time, for a few, the situation has never been better. Science fiction and fantasy by Frank Herbert, Robert A. Heinlein, Anne McCaffrey, Stephen Donaldson, and others has found a place on the bestseller lists, and there is every indication that readers continue to want work by famous and established writers.

It does no good to rail against this situation, and there is little likelihood that things will change any time soon. How might we, given what is the case, help both successful writers and struggling authors while keeping the desires of readers and the profits of publishers in mind? There is a solution, but before mentioning that solution, it will be necessary to survey the past briefly.

In the days of pulp magazines, it was not uncommon for stories to have "house names" as bylines. Several writers might use the same byline or pseudonym for their work in a particular magazine, though this house name remained the property of the publisher. At other times, two collaborators might use a joint *nom de plume* to distinguish their collaborative efforts from tales each had written alone.

House names, still used by paperback publishers of series in certain cases, have some value. Readers become accustomed to a particular byline, associating it with one type of story, while many individual writers using that name find work that they might not otherwise have.

Ghostwriting, of course, has been around for a long time, and recently the "celebrity



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Photo: Jay Kay Klein

memoir" has become a staple of publishing. Actresses, malefactors once high in government, and other persons of note now "write" books by holding forth in the presence of tape recorders and turn the tapes over to a ghostwriter. The byline on the book remains the celebrity's name in many cases, and the famous person may come to believe that she has actually written the book, as a glance at any talk show will prove. Thus do a fortunate few live out a fantasy common to many; being the author of a book without having to write it. The point must be made: it does not matter whether the alleged author has actually written the book.

The art of blurb writing, which may seem to be a separate subject, is in fact a related one. How often, in perusing the latest offerings, are you assured by comments on the cover that a book is a saga as enthralling as *Dune*, has the scope of Arthur C. Clarke, is more suspenseful than the work of Stephen King, is a novel to rank with



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# VIEWPOINT

*The Lord of the Rings*, or is in the tradition of Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, or Ursula K. Le Guin? The publisher is clearly stating that, in the absence of a new offering by King, Tolkein, or Asimov, you are holding the next best thing; the publisher knows that the famous name—the "brand name," if you will—attracts more readers than a new title coupled with an unfamiliar byline. Often a famous writer will contribute a prominently featured cover comment.

Such a recourse, unfortunately, bears the seeds of its own destruction. Why should a reader buy a book in the tradition of Heinlein or Asimov when he can buy a Heinlein or an Asimov? Since many of the most famous science fiction writers continue to be productive, there is little need for work by lesser-known talents; a publisher could easily make handsome profits by publishing only new work, and reprints of old work, by the prominent and popular.

This situation bodes ill for



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the future of science fiction and fantasy. Although it is pleasing to see older writers gain the rewards of a lifetime of work, there is little room for the beginner to establish herself, and publishers may be unable to continue to reissue old works in that sad time—still, let us pray, far in the future—when there will be no new novels forthcoming by the most-loved writers.

The solution, given what I have set down so far, is obvious. Younger writers, in the interests of furthering their careers, fattening their bank balances, satisfying readers, and producing work profitable for publishers, must consider giving up their own names and taking the names of the writers who have most influenced them.

How would such a plan work? Quite simply, Author A, a talented but unknown writer, would swear fealty to Author B, a famous and successful writer. The details of such an arrangement could safely be left to them, but it would be understood that Author A would write in the tradition of Author B—would, in fact, *become* Author B.

The benefits to an unknown writer would be enormous. There would be higher advances, and Author A would still be free to develop artistically within the confines of Author B's personality. As time passes, Author A would eventually pass on the name to yet another writer, and a lineage, like the title of a noble family, would be established, with the advantage that such an inheritance would be based on merit rather than birth. In the case of extremely prolific writers, an authorial or literary family may result, with many descendants, since a productive writer may require two or three such heirs to carry on her work, each mining a different imaginative vein.

The well-established writer would also benefit. He would know that his name would live on, that his vision would endure, that his sensibility would be part of the future. As things are, this may be as



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close to immortality as any man or woman can come. It would be the responsibility of such a writer to insure, perhaps through a period of apprenticeship for the heir, that his standards prevail; in return, he will have the devotion of generations of readers. Since he, through his *alter ego*, will continue to write, his earlier books are also likely to stay in print, and he will have the joy of knowing that all of those novels he does not have time to write will be written. His notes, sketches, and outlines will be given to the heir.

The benefits to publishers need not be outlined. Having spent sums to make a name widely known, a publisher can reap the benefits for ages to come. We who write science fiction often fancy that we can understand trends and glimpse visions of the world to be. We live in a society where great amounts of capital are spent in promoting brand names for all sorts of products; we would serve ourselves better if we came to terms with this fact in our own lives.

Readers should welcome this proposal as well. Who wouldn't rejoice knowing that the chronicles of Dune might eventually fill several shelves, that McCaffrey's dragons will continue to soar, that Heinlein's competent individualists will be in bookstores for the span of Lazarus Long's life? Our great-grandchildren would have the pleasure, as we do now, of looking forward to the latest works of Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Larry Niven, or Jerry Pournelle. Whole libraries may eventually be devoted to the works of one writer.

Some will claim that such a proposal would subvert one of the primary purposes of literature, that of revealing an individual perspective, a distinctive voice. But there would be nothing to prevent a writer from working under his own name; he could carve out his territory, as Norman knights once did, and acquire heirs and vassals of his own. This path, of course, would be



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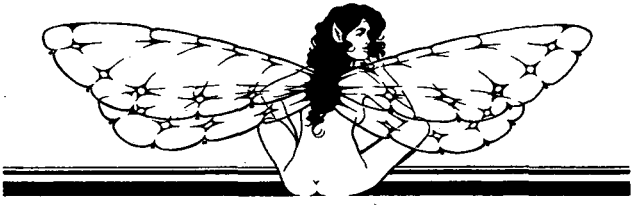
taken by only a few, but would it honestly be any more difficult than it has been in the past? Becoming a writer of note has never been a goal for the faint-hearted; the writer's world is a Darwinian one.

A more pertinent question might be: How many works are truly original? The sad fact is that precious few are; most are derivative. Many writers already write within a framework and tradition laid out by a predecessor; my proposal would serve to make this explicit. There are only a few truly creative and original minds in any generation. The trend is clear—blurbs likening one writer to another, the writing of books based on the notes and outlines of one writer by a second writer, ghostwriting, the preference of many readers for the series or trilogy. It is up to science fiction writers to be the first to establish these literary families; others will soon follow suit.

In the end, how many different stories are written? Perhaps we are all simply writing the same ones over and over—the quest, the tale of a love lost and found, the story of a god becoming man or a man becoming God—all modeled on older stories, which are in turn derived from myths. The patterns remain the same; individuality itself may be an illusion, a false perception maintained by the tiny cells of one vast organism.

It is my earnest hope that all of you will take this suggestion to heart, and perhaps recommend it to your favorite writers. ●





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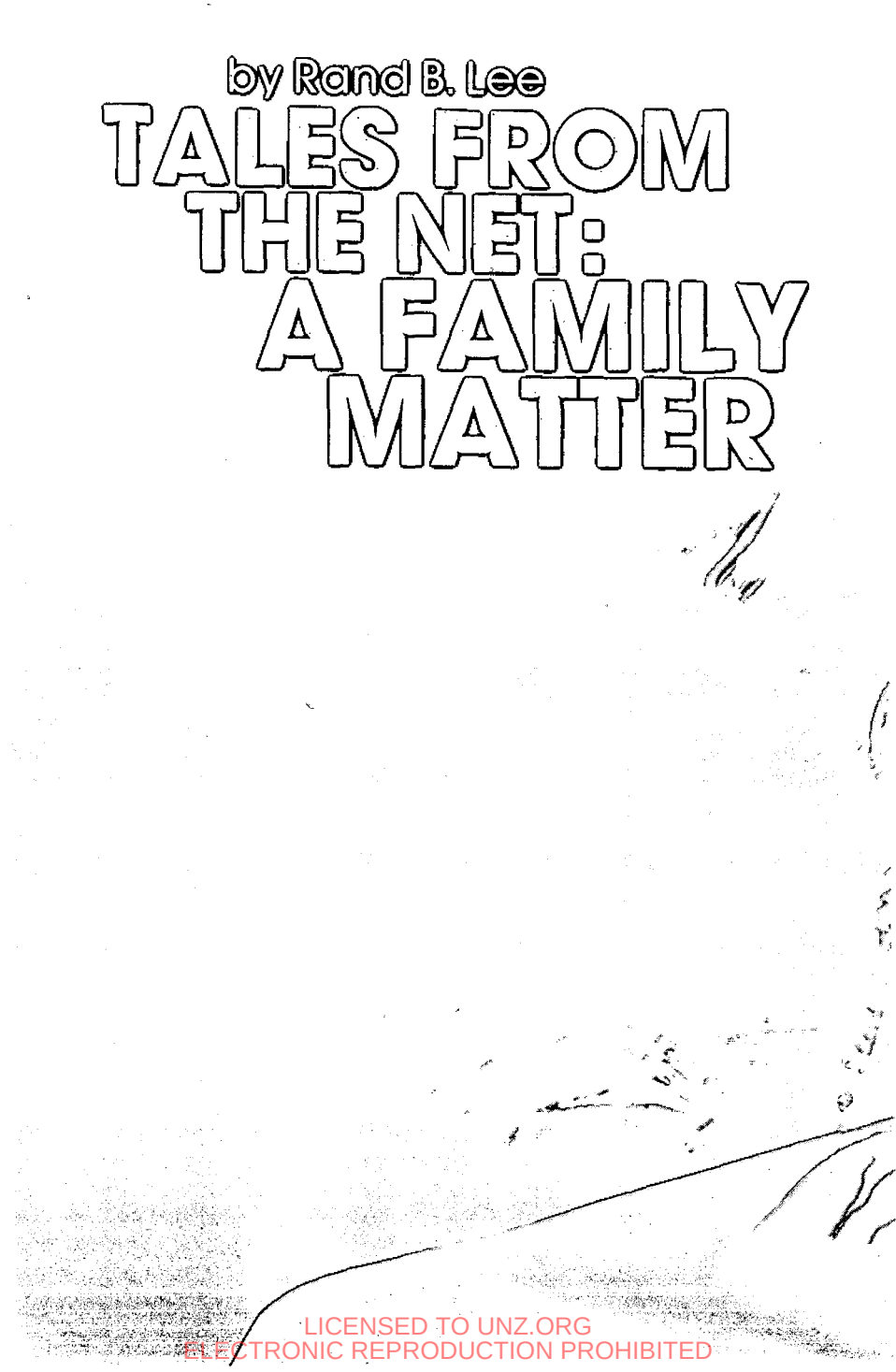
by Rand B. Lee

# TALES FROM THE NET: A FAMILY MATTER



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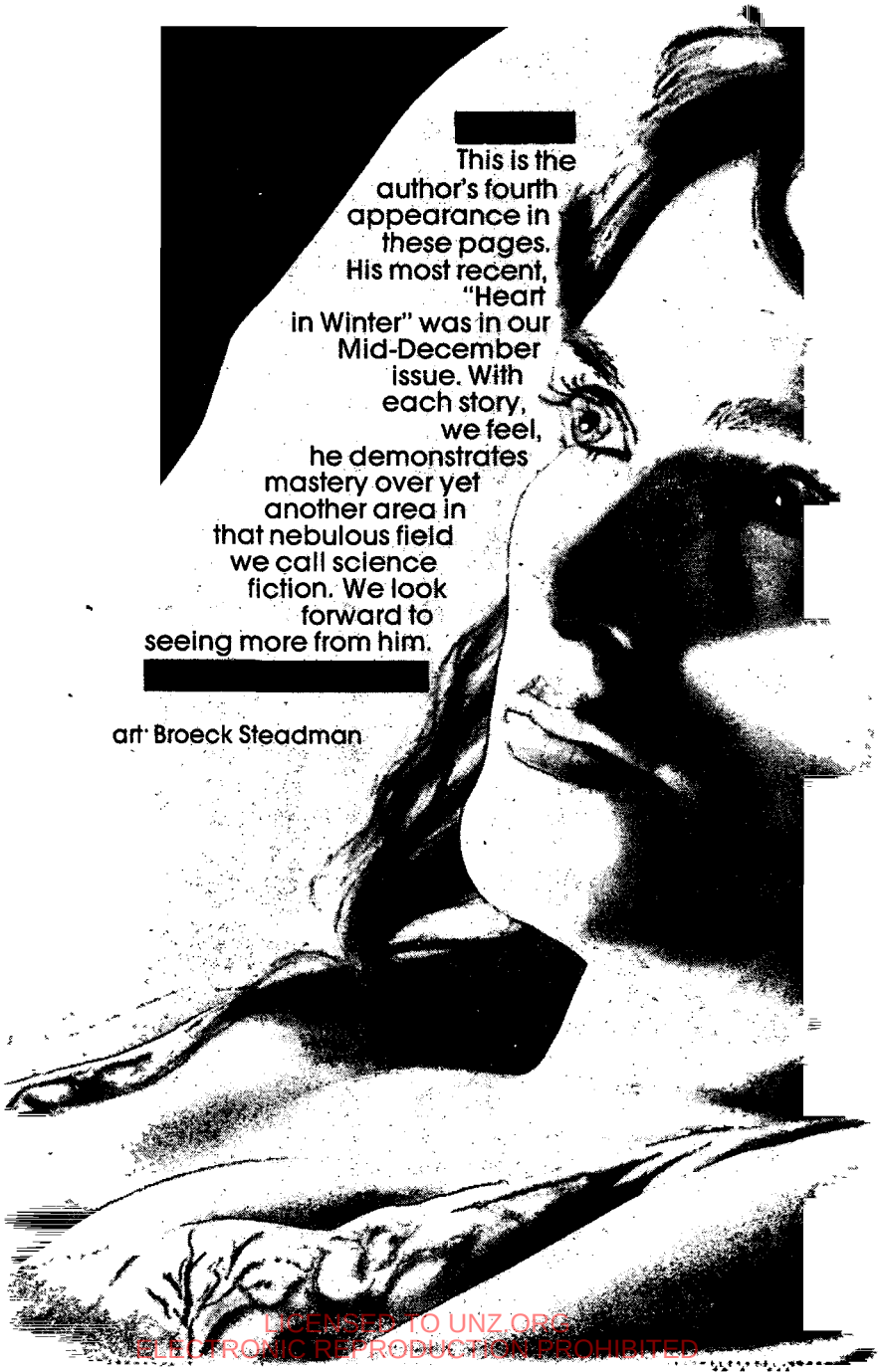
This is the author's fourth appearance in these pages. His most recent, "Heart in Winter" was in our Mid-December issue. With each story, we feel, he demonstrates mastery over yet another area in that nebulous field we call science fiction. We look forward to seeing more from him.
art: Broeck Steadman

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Can you remember, oh slow of mind, the very, very, very old days, when we could travel only the merest half of the speed of light and Earth was the only planet that had anything on it more complicated than bacteria? Try. We'd figured out by then that the Earth's moon was a silly place to live, so we'd put ten or eleven colonies in freefall stations, and used the moon for mining. Folks still lived on Earth, of course. Awful things had happened, but nothing so awful that the people who ran the world couldn't live with themselves (things like Chinese dying and No More Whooping Cranes, *Ever*). As we said, this was in the very, very, very old days, before the speed of light became unimportant to physics, before the Damanakippith/fy.

That's "/fy," arm-slash ef "y"-as-in-Danish-"Holeby." (Remember Danish?) Get it right. People used to pronounce it "Duh-MAN-uh-KIP-ith-FOO," or -"FEE" if they saw it in print. We would laugh today. So: purse your lips as though you were going to say "oo," then without changing their position, say "ee." The French said the "u" in "tu" the same way. (Remember French?)

But on to our story. This is a supplement to your central DataNet entry, which you will find cross-referenced under **RIGEL KENT, RIGEL KENTI, CENTAURI ALPHA** and **CASTLETON, CATHERIN.** To whit:

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

One day all the HV's and papers were full of headlines like: **WE ARE NOT ALONE!** and **LAND DOWN UNDER CONTACTS WORLD OUT THERE!** The scandal sheets were more imaginative: **ALIENS TO INVADE EARTH** and **JESUS SOON TO RETURN, CLAIM SCIENTISTS.** Folks flocked to their DataNet consoles as you are doing this very minute, straining their souls for each precious droplet from the U.N. Space Information Agency, learning more about Alpha Centauri than they'd ever thought there was to know, until any child over the age of three could tell you that A.C. was a triple-star system; that Alpha Centauri C, or Proxima Centauri, was the star nearest our own; that Alpha Centauri A, which everyone had always meant when they said "Alpha Centauri," was so much like Sol as to be her sister; that Alpha A's real, private name was Rigel Kent. *Rigel-rhymes-with-Nigel-and-there-are-PEOPLE-there!!*

Well, something.

No, no; they didn't land in Australia: that was much later. At this time things were not looking good for the prospect of there being extraterrestrial intelligence. They were looking better than they had looked, of course; they had found those bacteria in the



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atmosphere of Titan, and even a stupid bacterium is better than no bacterium at all. Australia caught the first transmissions. The scientists who sorted them out from the usual stargunk were named Tye and Goolagong. It was quite some time before their findings were taken seriously by the Scientific Community. Of course, all hell broke loose. The mathematical progressions became a flow of rather a different sort, and gradually everyone realized that the signalers were (1) telling us where they were, (2) encouraging us to visit them at the earliest opportunity, (3) telling us how to augment our propulsion systems so that we could visit them before the twenty-fourth century. (This was rather early in the twenty-second.) They also informed us that they had a good idea how aggressive we were, and had not wanted to give us the heebee-jeebees by visiting us first.

Ho-ho. Suspicions, recriminations, international jockeying, and a mad case of the who-gets-to-go's. Then Catherin Castleton, sculptor, actor, writer, gardener, and architect, stood up outside her marvelous house in Little Bedwyn, Wiltshire, England, and declared to the world that she would represent the Fine Arts to the aliens. Everyone laughed, except her husband, who was off bedding women somewhere, and her son Anthony, whom she never noticed. But they let her go along. And as it turned out, it was well that they did.

So the World Prepared. How the Gentiles raged; how the nations trembled. Religious denominations shuddered and snapped back, surprisingly unscathed; they'd accepted dolphins, hadn't they? Two U.S. corporations financed small coups in South America simply out of feelings of insecurity. People lit tapers to Arthur C. Clarke, and the great-great-grand-niece of Isaac Asimov found herself snatched from a comfortable obscurity and plunged into the DataNet to talk about What It All Meant. New Yorkers remained unperturbed: "They'll just be another bunch of Jew-loving liberals." Or: "They'll just be another bunch of neo-Nazi imperialists." Or: "When they lower my rent, then I'll get excited." Ten humans went, and one member of the Delphinate Confederacy. With the augmented drive, it took them eight years to get to Rigel Kent and four years to get back, the difference attributable to additional D'/fy improvements. Only five came back, all humans. One human died en route, one by accident in the Centauri system; three (and the dolphin) were asked to stay as extended contact volunteers.

Of the five who returned, Catherin Castleton was one.

Everyone was shocked. It was she who had kept them all abreast



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of the progress of the expedition; she could express herself so much more thrillingly than her comrades. Her voice, full of wonder and only somewhat edited, had resounded in the Net for eight years. And when the actual First *Face-to-Face* Contact was made, she kept them with her every breathtaking step, so that they forgot that everything they were hearing was already 4.3 years old. The people in the freefall colonies said, "Aha, aha," because it became clear that the Rigel Kenti were not Rigel Kenti at all. They were explorers like us, but planetless. (Various militaries wet their pants.) The Damanakippith/fy met the humans and the dolphin on the D'/fy ship, which was the size of Brooklyn.

Catherin Castleton fell in love with them. They fell in love with her, which surprised everybody except the dolphin, whom nothing surprised, not even sharks. So when her transmissions stopped, and were replaced by the flat, unimaginative nasals of the American expedition chief, the world wondered. Four years later, they wondered even harder. The starship docked at New Hope, the U.N. freefall colony. Four humans walked out. One human was carried out in a textbook state of catatonia. Hurrying after her were three very odd creatures, blinking like newborns in the lights of the station. They were not D'/fy. The D'/fy had sent word about them and most of the world never heard a thing. It heard little more about Catherin Castleton. She had had a nervous breakdown, her crewmates said. She was hospitalized. Her son Anthony, who had been ten, was now twenty-five; he visited her in the hospital and came out ashen.

"What's she like?" demanded a reporter from the *National Enquirer*. What Anthony replied reverberated for years in the imaginations of billions:

"In love." Then he hit the reporter.

TONY:

It is forty years later, roughly. Tony is sixty-five, give or take a few months. There have been other expeditions. At a cocktail party in Neal's Yard, London, we find an interesting mix of persons. The host, self-termed host-ess, is a dull sort, still impressed by her transsexualism, which everyone has long ago accepted. Her guests are an assortment of writers, artists, actors, drug-dealers, and prostitutes, witty liberals all. It is a Twenty-Third Century Party in honor of the announced upcoming visit of the Damanakippith/fy to Earth. Earth is agog, to say the least. In the religious houses, prayers for journey mercies are being offered. In Moscow, welcome scenarios are being drawn up and discarded.



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(Remember Moscow?) They're going to land in Australia, anyway. Every science fiction lover on Earth and elsewhere has developed chronic insomnia. At the party they are talking about it. "It seems too good to be true," says someone. "Discovering them was unbelievable enough, but *this*."

"They discovered us," another guest points out. "The single most important event in the history of our planet. Absolutely. From the moment they touch ground, nothing will be the same again."

"What about contamination?"

"There's no interaction between their pathogens and us. How could there be? It's as silly as interfertility."

"Well, they breathe oxygen."

"So do jellyfish."

"*I* want to know about their *sex* lives." This from the Holo Hotsy responsible for **LOVE ALIENS STOLE MY SON.**

"Their sex lives aren't gender-related," replies the party expert. "They're mammals, or they were once, but they've left all that behind. They don't reproduce. Or not very often."

"Evolved to Purity," breathes the Hotsy. "How cleansing."

"What bullshit this all is," mutters Anthony Castleton-Lent. He is one of two persons at the party who is not dressed in Saran Wrap and leather. The other person is a science fiction novelist who is feeling the hot breath of reality on the neck of his profession and refuses to play.

"Stupid party," agrees the writer. "Look at what they're wearing. People will never wear that sort of thing. They all used to predict *we* would, didn't they, and are we?" Have we mentioned that this is the middle of the twenty-second century?

"Didn't you write *Sword of the Quellish?*" asks Anthony. The writer brightens.

"Why, yes. The second in my trilogy."

"It was the most asinine piece of garbage I've ever read."

"Clarion, you're monopolizing Mr. Castleton-Lent." The hostess is smiling between them. Behind her, a short broad man waits unsteadily. "Tony, I'd like you to meet Walter Gaspard. He's the film critic for *The Observer*."

"A filthy rag," Gaspard says. His Saran Wrap has slipped and hangs from his muscular frame in incongruous diaphaneity. "Nothing to do with my wanting to meet you. I'm very drunk. Your mother was Catherin Castleton?"

Silence swoops down and takes the party by the throat. "*Is*



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Catherin Castleton," says Tony mildly. "She's still alive, you know."

"She must be in her nineties."

"One-oh-one," says Tony. "Are you being the stereotypical reporter, Mr. Gaspard, or is idle curiosity the only motive for your vulgarity?" Middleage Tony is no more muscular than he was at twenty-five, but he is a better fighter.

"Not vulgarity, sir. Not at all." The hostess makes pained faces; it is clear that she has done her best to circumvent this encounter. "I want to know what *she* thinks of all this."

"All what?"

"Their coming here."

"A lot of people would like to know that," observes the science fiction writer.

"But no one has had the tactlessness to inquire before now," replies Tony.

"Is she still insane?" asks Gaspard. People gasp. "Wait, it's an honest question, honestly posed. Has she been cured? A lot of people care about her. Nobody's heard anything for a long time. She was our guiding star, don't you see. You don't forget someone like that. A lot of people would like to know what exactly happened to her out there."

"*Was* it," says the writer cautiously, "a lovers' quarrel?"

Tony performs an intricate maneuver. Gaspard flies backwards, taking the writer and a poor reproduction of Michelangelo's *David* with him. "My, that felt good," Tony announces. "My."

Alone in the elevator, he begins to tremble. He is conscious of no great emotion coursing through him, but he cannot stop shaking, and this bothers him. *Go home,* he says to the ceiling. *Go home where you belong, wherever that is, you soulsucking bastards.* He knows that he is being unfair to the D'/fy. They are neither monstrous nor angelic, and his mother's insanity was not their doing. He blames them nonetheless, there being no one else to blame but himself. He wonders whether Catherin has heard the news. Wiltshire is only ten minutes away by tube. But he has not seen her in many years, and he has spoken with her only twice, and he cannot summon the courage to change.

The elevator smooths to a halt, and the door opens. The woman standing before him looks both capable and harassed, which is a combination that intrigues him. He starts to move past her, and she steps quickly in front of him. "Mr. Castleton-Lent?" she asks. He nods. She shows her identification; she is from the World



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Health Organization. "I'm afraid we need your help. You're a tough person to track."

"I've dancing feet," he mutters. "What's wrong with Mother?"

"I'm sorry; she's dead. We think it was suicide. Would you mind very much coming with me?"

He does not mind in the least.

WHAT HAPPENED (SEVEN YEARS PREVIOUSLY):

In the marvelous house on the hill, the old woman was taking her bath. She was not enjoying it. Her skin was pale, because she seldom took the outside sunlight any more; it was wrinkled, because all the fizzpools in the world could not halt the dessication of Time (as they still cannot). Otherwise it was healthy skin, like the healthy muscles beneath it, and the healthy sacks of her lungs, and the healthy pump of her heart, and the strong whole healthy bones at her core. Her eyes still pierced; her brow still commanded; her nose still rivaled the beaks of eagles. "Ellery Green!" she cried. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning!" Her voice began deep, then splintered.

It was truly a marvelous house. She had designed it herself, in the years before the Rigel Kent expedition. Every room was a pleasure and a wonder, or had been. The water sucked at her withered shanks: it was lightly carbonated, fortified with herbs, her favorite healthdunk. If she had chosen, she could have swum in it. The pool took up most of the chamber. Above the pool, a skylight dripped soft English day over the shineystone tiles. Catherin Castleton, for that is who she was, avoided much of the sun, preferring to huddle in the shaded shallow end of the bath, where coleus spread velvet fire and feather jasmine sweetened the dim damp air. The room was thick with blooming orchids, sweeps of color: dendrobiums in jeweled cascades; phalaenopsis like flights of moths; great vulgar cattleyas demanding attention where they ignited the foliage. "Molly Malone!" she yelled.

Her voice echoed. The orchids were not precisely what they seemed to be, like everything else in Castleton's Castle. The microsensors in their leaves conveyed her cries to three sets of odd ears. She waited. "The hell with them," she muttered. "Keeping me so goddam healthy. Couldn't just let me die in peace." The pool continued to fizz, and all at once it seemed to her that the bubbles had lost their friendliness and become the burblings of a cauldron, with she its eye of newt. "Ellery Green! Elizabeth Barrett Browning! I'm drowning, you imbeciles; who'll feed you then?"



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An emerald streaked past the bathroom ceiling. A very large conure with a very strange head circled the room three times, then landed on a railing not far from where Catherin was huddling. He peered at her. "Gautama Buddha," he exclaimed. "Stow the racket, you old bag. Can't you ask for a towel like any normal human being?"

"I'm no more a normal human being than you are a normal goddam parrot," snapped the old woman. "Where's Elizabeth?"

"Taking a crap, if you must know," said the conure. "And I'm not a parrot." He flapped to a towel rack and brought her a towel. She grabbed the dangling end and drew the cloth down to her. The bird retreated to his perch. He was not simply a bird, of course; neither was he a mechanism. Like most of us, he had been grown, albeit under unusual circumstances.

"Wait!" cried Castleton. "Help me get out."

"That's what the rail's for."

"What if I slip?"

"You'll fall on your ass," replied Ellery. "Big deal. I don't expect any stars will go nova over it."

"Ellery, goddam it help me!" She rose from the water and made a shaky attempt at holding the towel around her while grasping the rail. Ellery did not want her to fall, but he was not deceived. He flew close and bit her gently in a soft place. She shot up the steps from the pool like a rocket and fell wetly into the arms of her marvelous floor. She yelled obscenities.

At this critical juncture, the cat padded in. "He bit me," panted Catherin. "That son of a lizard bit me!" Elizabeth Barrett Browning was nearly the size of a leopard; her huge head made her seem larger. Her innards, like Ellery's, would have sent a zoologist screaming into the night. Her silver fur winked against the shineystone. "Elizabeth, are you listening to me?" demanded the old woman.

"Hwaet wilt thu thaet ic the do?" asked the cat.

"It's a conspiracy. Molly Malone!"

"Englisc cnawst thu. Hwaerfor nilt thu hit sprecan?"

"Uh, Libby, I don't think this is the time," observed the conure. He hopped over to Castleton, who was screaming incoherently. He did something swift and utterly unparrotlike in the vicinity of the woman's spine. She stopped screaming, and the red slowly drained from her face. She closed her eyes. "Catherin," he said, as softly as he could. She nodded. "We're your friends. You're not treating us like friends any longer. One moment you ignore us, the next you command us, another you're screaming like a help-



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less infant. We can keep your body whole and your mind calm when things get out of hand. Clearly that isn't enough." He waited. At length she shook her head, still with eyes shut, agreeing with him. "What can we do? We want to help."

"Even Molly is worried, Catherin," said the cat. "You don't eat what she prepares for you; you seldom go into the garden, and never during the day; you spend all your time in the library at the Net. It isn't good for you."

"Maybe," said Catherin Castleton, "I want to do something bad for me." She huddled in her towel. "Maybe I'm tired of being taken care of."

"Would you like us to leave?" asked the cat. The woman's eyes flew open and burned desperate.

"No, no," she said. Her hands clutched. "No, Elizabeth, for God's sake, don't leave me. You're all I have."

"By your own choice," said Ellery. "There's your son."

"I assume you mean Tony."

"Have you children we don't know about?" inquired the cat.

"You know everything about me."

"If we did, we'd know how to handle you now," remarked the conure.

"I don't need 'handling,' " snapped Catherin. "I'm not a goddam orchid. And don't tell me about Tony. Our relationship is purely biological; I haven't even seen him in, Christ, who knows." She made an impatient gesture, dismissing Tony. "You know what I meant. You're all I have of *them*."

"The Rigel Kenti?" asked Elizabeth.

"I told you not to call them that." She was on her feet, this person who complained about being too feeble to get out of a pool. "That's not their name. I forbid you to call them that in my house. They are the Damanakippith/fy. They do not come from Rigel Kent. They are not bisexual. They are not Love Aliens. They are not angels from God or demons from Hell. They are themselves."

"They may be," said Ellery, "but you sure as hell aren't." He returned to his perch, from which he peered down at her. "You say you want to do something bad for you. You're on the right track. At this rate, you'll be a cripple in a year and a vegetable in five. Ever seen a ninety-nine-year-old person drool? It isn't pretty. It's even less pretty when she could have avoided it."

"Please," she said. Her hands were at her sides. "Please tell them. I'm tired. I want to go back." Her right eye teared. "I want to go *home*."

She left the marvelous bathroom and closed the door behind



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her. The conure and the cat sat among the orchids. The pool seethed fragrantly. "We're losing her, Ellery," said Elizabeth.

"I don't understand it. I just don't," replied the conure. "She knows we love her. It's these damn bodies." His feathers rustled. "She thinks of us as pets, or as fairy tale characters. If we were bipedal—"

"We'd remind her too much of them," said the cat. She yawned and stretched, like any feline. "That's why they grew us like this. To be a reminder of them, but not a torment."

"Apparently they've misjudged her. They should have wiped her when they had the chance."

Elizabeth narrowed her big eyes. "That would have been evil."

"Yeah, yeah, I know; it would've removed her choice. The D'/fy are big on that. Pardon me if at the moment amnesia seems exceptionally appealing to me."

The cat observed him. "Ellery," she said. "You hate them, don't you?"

Ellery shifted uncomfortably on his perch. "Who, me? Hate the folks who made us who we are today? Hell, no. What's better than being an immortal parrot with a human brain?"

"Being a human with a human brain," suggested Elizabeth softly.

Ellery made the noise that passed for shrugging. "Humans have hands," he said. "Hands are such shit to clean. Claws, now; they're self-sharpening." He gave a chuckle. "How could I hate the D'/fy? If it weren't for them, we'd still be nebbishy little cells in Catherin's cerebral cortex, and witless bits of a bunch of witless lab specimens. Can you picture me saying, 'Polly want a cracker?' day in, day out? Nah. Better to be beaked than not to be at all."

"You're lying," said the cat, "but that's your prerogative. We have Catherin to worry about. I think it's time for a council of war."

"Of peace," said Ellery Green. "I'll meet you." He flapped his wings. His lifter unit zizzed, and he floated away, like a huge butterfly. The door opened for him.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning did not follow immediately. She stood, tail twitching, eyes fixed on a spot in space halfway between a dendrobium and a paphiopedilum. Unlike the conure, she had never resented whom she had been made to be; she enjoyed the swift litheness of her body and the intricate power of her senses. But she thought, *Maybe he's right. Maybe it would have been better had they wiped away her memories of them. But they chose to treat her like one of their family, and give her certain knowledge of their*



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*deepest selves, and she accepted this despite the cost. They could not know that sending her away would not heal her shock. Now it is up to us to summon them to save her. And we must do it soon, lest the shadows take her from all hope of love.* She padded from the shineystone chamber, smoothly as a retreating oil slick, to find Molly Malone.

TONY (CONTINUED):
Tony and the W.H.O. woman change tubes at Reading. "Tell me about her," she prods. "Was she the suicidal type?"

"You don't know?"

"We know she returned catatonic from Rigel Kent. We know she was privately doctored, in her own home, and that she recovered. But the catatonia was not her doing, it seems; it was the by-product of some unsuccessful psychic bonding with the D'/fy."

"I'd say that Mother was basically a survivor."

"How did she seem to you when you saw her last?"

"Fit and feisty." He is lying. *Comatose,* he thinks.

"Relatively?"

"Absolutely. She beat me at tennis. I'm very good at tennis." He called her twice, but it was in those first ten years.

"She wasn't depressed?"

"She's always been a little depressed, particularly since she returned from the expedition. She was very sick."

"The last you knew she was well?"

"Yes." He had heard from friends of friends in the W.H.O. that his mother was coping. "Uh, this wasn't very recently."

"I see."

"I don't like your tone."

"We're required to investigate the possibility that emotional negligence on the part of her legal intimates contributed to her death."

"Only in cases where there are criminal charges being brought to bear by a friend or relative." He stares at her. "Is this such a case?"

"It could turn into one."

"I can't believe that she put me down as a legal intimate."

"The Space Agency did. You're her only relative."

"She had friends."

The officer tries not to grin, reading the guilt on his face, in his shoulders, draining the blood from his knuckles. "You know damn well you haven't seen her in forty years. I'm advising my client to prosecute."



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*Prosecute. You should have known when she said W.H.O.,* he thinks. "I'm not required to assist you in your advisory duties," he reminds her coldly. "But I'd give a lot to know who has the goddam gall to consider pressing negligence charges against *me.*"

"The Damanakippith/fy," replies the officer.

WHAT HAPPENED (CONTINUED):

The old woman sat before the DataNet console, watching worlds flicker in response to the Net Lady's sugar voice. About her hung her old books, old friends, now neglected in their slick protective bindings. "Rigel Kent," said the Net Lady. Three stars burned in the Net. A lurid red arrow pointed to Alpha Centauri A. *Dam/hihivo,* muttered Catherin silently. The stars began to dance in simulated orbit. "Although not visible from Earth's northern hemisphere, the Alpha Centauri star-group is the third brightest in the terrestrial heavens. In the 1830s, British astronomer Thomas Henderson made the first computations of the distance of the group from our Sun. At about 4.3 light-years away, Alpha Centauri is our closest stellar neighbor. Alpha A, Rigel Kent, is remarkably similar to our Sun in size, warmth, and brightness."

A man's head appeared below the star-model. "In his book, *Habitable Planets for Man,* first published in 1964, American scientist Stephen Dole estimated the chances of Alpha A and B possessing habitable planets to be one in ten. The third member of the group, Alpha C or Proxima Centauri, was judged by Dole to be too cool a star to possess satellites suitable for human colonization. For many years prior and subsequent to Dole's writings, science fiction writers chose Alpha Centauri as the setting for their speculative romances of extraterrestrial contact. It was not until the middle of the twenty-first century that refinements in telescopy produced equipment sufficiently sensitive to detect exceedingly minute anomalies in the motions of the nearer stars." The man's figure faded. The three stars swelled until they filled the Net, brightest, dimmer, dimmest; hot, cooler, coolest. *Dam/hihivo,* thought Catherin. *Dam/fnikkirh, Dam/bnethu.* The Net Lady continued on her syrupy way; the old woman did not notice. She was swept up in the words they had taught her, words like rain on an upturned face, words like old light in corners.

"Catherin," said the cow. The Net faded; the library was itself again. "Catherin, can you hear me?"

"Unfortunately," said the old woman. She blinked. "What is it, Molly? I'm not hungry." They were close to her, just around the corner. "What is it?"



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"The others say you want to go back to Dam/hihivo."

"Oh, yes," she said. Her deep voice broke. "Oh, Jesus God, yes." She clapped her hands. "You know what, Molly? I was just dreaming about it, the expedition. Four years awake, four years in cold storage like a goddam ice cream bar. When we woke up, Carole Hsu was gone. It would have made us crazy, but there was Alpha A, by God."

"Catherin."

"Yellow, like a goddam dandelion. And not one planet, not a single one, just as they'd predicted. Then we swing around the other side and there's Alpha B waiting for us. I nearly shit in my pants."

"Catherin." The woman had a foolish look in her eyes; under the glow from the quiescent console, the irises were milky, like those of a blind person. "Catherin, tell me how I've failed you."

"Failed me?" Castleton replied. She seemed genuinely surprised. "You haven't failed me, hon." She scratched the skin above the cow's eyes. While the others were large for their species, Molly was small, about the size of a Saint Bernard. Her head had fared badly in its alteration for human speech: she looked, Castleton liked to remark, like a macrocephalic cartoon bovine from a dairy association advertisement. "You haven't failed me, Molly. None of you have. It's just that I stopped being happy the moment they told me I couldn't stay."

"Ellery thinks you hate us." Her eyes were liquid and mild, and Castleton found that she could not look into them for long. "He says that making us was a mistake."

"I never asked them to," she said bitterly. "I only asked them for one thing: to let me stay."

"And we've never asked you for anything else, either."

"What do you mean?" asked the old woman.

The cow could not smile, but her eyes warmed. "You're leaving us, Catherin. Not physically: mentally. Spiritually. You're withdrawing more and more. I believe you when you say it isn't hatred. Still, its effect is the same. Have you stopped to consider what we are without you?"

"Why," said Catherin, "I . . ." and quieted.

"Answer me this, Catherin. We've known you for forty years, less the four years we were in hibernation on the way back from the D'/fy, and the two years Ellery, Elizabeth, and I spent being analyzed by the W.H.O. The D'/fy fashioned us from your stuff. They made us to comfort you. When you die, what will become of us?"



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"I never asked them to make you," said the woman. The desperation had come back into her tone. "I'm not responsible. I like—I like you, but you aren't family." She gulped. "Not family. They showed me. I was them. I only wanted one thing: to stay. And they wouldn't let me." She did not notice that she had knotted her hands, or that she was crying.

"You were sick. They were frightened at what they'd done."

"I would have gotten better, there."

"Catherin, they didn't know that. All they knew was what they saw. They thought you needed your own people."

"*They were my people.*" In her rage she stood, as she had in the bathroom. "They *knew* that. We laid ourselves bare to each other. I saw their old home, the one they lost; Molly, it was so beautiful, like Earth long ago, only they never made the mistakes we did. So they let Lacey stay behind with them, that slimy pederast, and Kogo. It was Kogo's fault Carole died."

"The computer reported a malfunction in the cryometry."

She was not hearing. "So what do they send me back to? A husband who—and a son who—oh, *Jesus God,* what a goddam great Netshow this would make, huh, Mollycow Malone?"

"I love you," whispered the creature.

"Activate," Catherin ordered the DataNet. "Access: Rigel Kenti." In the Net, mists swirled. The old woman did not hear Molly leave the marvelous library, or see the three clones move together in the light of the hallway.

"It's time," said Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

"Past time," said Ellery Green. In the library, the Net Lady was forming confections of her data. "We've got to call them; there's no other hope for her."

"Do you think they'll come?" asked Molly. "They said, 'Only if her family cannot heal her.' You remember."

"They didn't know humans, and human families. They wouldn't have been able to comprehend that she didn't have one." Ellery chuckled. "They've had thirty-seven more years of experience with *Homo sapiens* since then. Maybe they've lost their illusions."

"If they don't come, she'll die of sorrow," said the cat.

"They'll have to come," said Molly Malone. "They'll just have to."

"Just one thing," added the conure. "If they don't come, and Catherin dies, we might find ourselves in a peculiar position. Despite my crack earlier, Libby, I realize that we're not immortal. The D'/fy sent us with Catherin to support her family in their attempts to set her right; it was their word to the Space Agency



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that kept us off the dissection tables. Exit Catherin, exit the Three Musketeers, possibly to a specimen case."

"We'll worry about that later," said Molly firmly. "It's time." And because it was, they placed their long distance call.

"Make it collect," suggested the conure.

TONY (CONCLUDED):

Tony and the W.H.O. officer walk the mile from the tube to Little Bedwyn, along the ancient canal. The officer points out watermint, deep green among the reeds. Tony is afraid of water and sticks close to the edge of the tow-path nearest the meadowland. It is a hot August. "The D'/fy," he says, suddenly. He strikes the officer with another outraged look. "I don't believe it."

"They're due here this November. Surprised?"

He is. "But it was just announced this week that they're coming."

"They've been on their way for more than three years. A year before they left they sent us a transmission about it; we received it last fall. It just took a while to filter down to the Net."

"You mean it was kept from us."

"Routine caution."

"How long," says Tony slowly, "has Mother been dead?"

But the canal curves then, taking the tow-path with it, and round the bend, Little Bedwyn appears, like Brigadoon out of the mists. Only ten buildings have been constructed in this village since the first moon landing, and only six in the century before that one. Many things have changed. The old Wiltshire accents have vanished, as have British accents the world over, flattened to death by the ubiquity of DataNet Americanese and the decline of the aristocracy. Telephone lines have vanished, too, and all smokestacks, and the stink of cars and trucks on the dark macadam roads. Yet Little Bedwyn remains Little Bedwyn, a medieval summer green, full of gardens. "There it is," points the officer.

The marvelous house is as he remembers it, spread out on the hill overlooking the village. Its thatch is not thatch, but solar filament; still, it looks like thatch, and so blends with the roofing of the other homes. A helicopter is parked in an empty field nearby. Tony remembers the field from his childhood; it was once mysterious with corn. They draw closer to the house. The slight disarray of the grounds presents itself: tangles, and things gone to seed, and the vicious spikes of hogweed among the rockeries. *Maybe it's always looked like that,* he thinks. A brisk policeman meets them at the gate. "Mr. Castleton-Lent?"



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"Where's my mother?" asks Tony hoarsely. "What's this all about? And has the lawyer been notified?"

They lead him into the house. It is not until the door has shut behind him that he realizes that his mother is not dead. A huge silver cat pads over wonderful carpet toward him. The policeman and the W.H.O. officer stand wary. The cat sits back on its haunches. It has a grotesque head, and a very strange manner; it looks at him out of animal eyes and he feels that he is in the presence of an elder. "I suppose you're wondering what this is all about," says the cat, mocking him.

Something flutters, and a sharp face pokes into his. Instinctively he raises his arms to protect his eyes. "Keep your shirt on, Tony," says a parrot-voice. "Nobody's going to hurt you."

"What—in—hell—is—going—*on*—here?" screams Tony. He looks at the policeman. "What are you? What is this? Where's my mother?"

"We didn't think you'd come if *we* asked you," says a third voice. It is rich and gentle; Tony finds himself calming. He looks, and looks away. "I know we must seem hideous to you. You must believe that what we've done, we've done for her good. And for yours."

"All right, already," squawks the conure. "Enough of the holo dialogue. Look at me, you stupid bastard." Tony looks. The parrot is the size of an eagle, with a beak to match his cranium. "Your mother is dying. She's dying because she's lonely. It's our job to keep her alive until November, when the D'/fy can get here and take care of her themselves. We need your help."

"Who are you?" Tony manages.

"The Pope declared us humans, an opinion we could dispute," says Ellery Green. "We're your mother's companions. The D'/fy cloned us; put us together from three of your mother's brain cells and some frozen stock in the expedition gene library. The U.N.'s known about us for years." He rises suddenly from his perch, and flutters to the shoulder of the W.H.O. officer, who smiles. "Over seven years ago, we sent a message to the D'/fy, asking them to set aside their gradual contact policy for Catherin's sake. Because they're the D'/fy, and not humans, they said yes. We couldn't tell Catherin we'd called them, because she would've wanted to know why we hadn't called them sooner. And we didn't get their yes until last fall. So for the past seven years, we've been watching your mother take the long slide."

"This week the visit was announced through the Net," says the cat, "and Catherin heard it."



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"We weren't prepared for the violence of her reaction," says Molly Malone. "We nursed her out of her catatonia years ago, which is why she was entrusted to our care. This is nearly as bad. Maybe worse."

"Why?" He croaks it at the W.H.O. officer. "She and I are strangers. Literally. There are no sharings between us. I don't mean anything to her." *Nor she to me,* he thinks.

Says the cow, "All we ask is that you spend one hour with her. She doesn't soil herself, and when I say she's violent I don't mean she breaks things."

"And she's no uglier than a one-hundred-and-one year old should be," adds Ellery Green harshly.

"Just one hour," says the cat.

He blinks and blinks. "Why?"

"Because the D'/fy ask it, Mr. Castleton-Lent," says the officer. "As a favor to them. To their race. They want you to show her some love, you see."

"You toyed with me."

"You don't seem to have suffered from it much."

"And if I refuse the great D'/fy?"

Ellery makes a rude noise. "What do you want us to do? Appeal to your sense of history? You don't know much about the D'/fy, Tony-boy. You don't even know why they love her."

"*No, I don't.*" It is torn from him. "No, goddam it, I don't! A goddam self-important melodramatic Renaissance lady with neuroses ten parsecs wide and they decide to come to Earth because she feels *lonesome.*" He hurls himself across the foyer. "No, I don't know why. It's baffled me for forty years. When they sent her back, it made sense to me; I'd always known she was crazy. Weak." He is breathing hard. "The beloved of the H.V. crowd. The only reason she went at all was because she'd run out of limelights to stand in. Jesus." He runs his hand through his hair. "I don't have to do this. She was injured on an Agency mission; it's their responsibility."

"The D'/fy see it differently," observes the cat. Her eyes are huge. "They're all one family, you see, Tony. The whole race. One big homeless family. They're post-sexual but they aren't post-emotional. *And they're lonely, too.*" The strange mouth grimaces, an almost-smile. "They loved their home-world. Their family sent them out, and now they're all that's left, and they want a home. Having mammalian roots, they like green grass and water and sunlight. Space is cold. And they want friends."

"Don't bother, Elizabeth," says the conure. "He isn't listening



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and he couldn't catch the sense of it if he were. The gist, Anthony, is that they love her because of all the people they've met so far, she's the one most like them. Lonely and homeless. And they consider you her family."

"And they'll prosecute if I don't do this thing."

"It's such a small thing," says Molly Malone. "Just a gesture. An I-tried."

"Show me," he barks. They do. He goes into the bathroom and the door slides shut behind him. They hear the fizzpool fizzing and the sound of his voice, light, hesitant. Then they hear his cry. It is a long, low wail. And they prepare themselves for his retreat.

But he does not retreat, not until the end of the hour, when they open the door and he falls against them, stone-dumb, clawing for the exit. The three creatures watch him go. "I say good riddance," snaps Ellery Green.

"He did stay the hour," says the cat. "That's something. He did try. It must have been hard for him."

"We might have prepared him for it a little better," says Molly Malone. "For the—for the way she looks."

"I'd better go catch him," sighs the policeman. "What happens now? With the D'/fy? Do you think they'll accept what's been done?"

"I imagine so," says the W.H.O. woman. "Now it's a question of keeping her with us till they come for her."

"I think," says someone, "we can manage that." The door of the bathroom has opened again, and she is standing there looking at them out of her own eyes. She has not done this for some time. She still looks mutilated: her breasts are still gone, where she has struck them off, seeking the asexuality of the Damanakippith/fy; the toweling still sticks to her in strips, where she has glued it in mimicry of their soft and golden fur. But her eyes are her own. "Do you know who that was, Elizabeth Barrett Browning?" she says to the cat. "Ellery Green? Molly Malone? Do you know who that was? She gazes out toward the Wiltshire afternoon. "That was *family*. The dirty son-of-a-bitch."

"Only part of it," says the cow. There is general agreement among the orchids. Catherin Castleton goes back into the marvelous bathroom and shuts the shineystone door. She does not come out again until November. ●

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(From page 22)

# SOLUTION TO RUN, ROBOT, RUN!

It makes not the slightest difference how the man throws the ball. Since we know the dog trotted continually and at a constant rate during the man's walk around the reservoir, he will cover the same distance no matter what paths he takes. Let $x$ be the distance in miles around the reservoir. The man will finish the circuit in $x/5$ hours. During this time the dog will have trotted $2x$ miles regardless of how hard the man tosses the ball or in what direction.

After finishing his walk, the man encountered an attractive dark-eyed girl who was taking a stroll through the park with her own robot dog, Pasta. Walking dogs in Central Park, then as now, was an excellent way to meet strangers.

"I see our pets are made by different companies," said the man. "I wonder how accurate the manufacturers are these days in programming trotting speeds."

"Why don't we let the dogs race to find out?"

"Splendid idea. Let's set them both at 15 mph and see if they finish the race at the same time."

The man picked up a stick and drew a starting line in the snow. Then about 200 yards away he drew a finish line. When Farfel crossed the finish he was ahead of Pasta by about 10 yards.

"Sorry about that," said Farfel.

"I don't mind," said Pasta.

"It just shows you," said the man, "how careless our corporations are these days. If our pets had been made in Africa, instead of Japan, I'll bet they would have been nose to nose when they finished."

"Let's test them again," said the girl. "This time we'll let Farfel start ten yards behind Pasta. If their running times are consistent, they ought to cross the finish line at the same instant."

To the surprise of both pet owners, one of the dogs finished the race ahead of the other. Each dog ran at the same constant speed as before, and it took the owners some time to figure out why. Which dog finished first? You don't need algebra to decide, just some common sense and insight.

The answer is on page 94.



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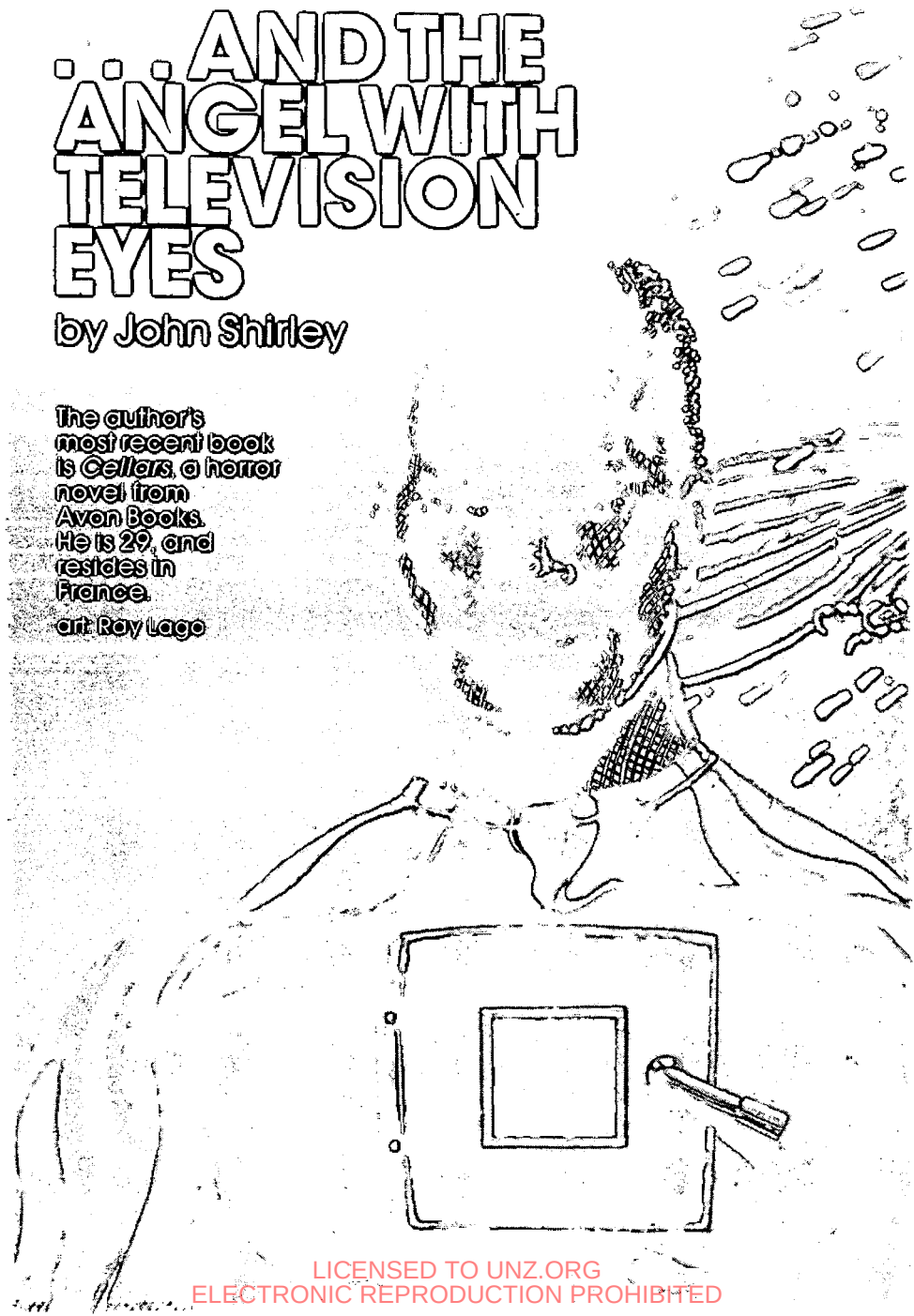
# . . . AND THE ANGEL WITH TELEVISION EYES

by John Shirley

The author's most recent book is *Cellars*, a horror novel from Avon Books. He is 29, and resides in France.

art: Ray Lago



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On a grey morning, April 11, the year 2000, Max Whitman woke in his midtown Manhattan apartment to find a living, breathing griffin perched on the right-hand post at the foot of his antique four-poster bed.

Max watched with sleep-fuzzed pleasure as the griffin—a griffin made of shining metal—began to preen its mirror-bright feathers with a hooked beak of polished cadmium. It creaked a little as it moved.

Max assumed at first that he was still dreaming; he'd had a series of oddly related technicolor-vivid dreams recently. Apparently one of these dreams had spilled over onto his waking reality. He remembered the griffin from a dream of the night previous. It had been a dream bristling with sharp contrasts: of hard-edged shafts of white light—a light that never warms—breaking through clouds the color of suicidal melancholy. And weaving in and out of those shafts of light, the griffin came flying toward him ablaze with silvery glints. And then the clouds coming together, closing out the light, and letting go sheets of rain. Red rain. Thick, glutinous rain. A rain of blood. Blood running down the sheer walls of a high-towered, gargoyle-studded castle carved of transparent glass. Supported by nothing at all: a crystalline castle still and steady as Mount Everest, hanging in mid-air. And laying siege to the sky-castle was a flying army of wretched things led by a man with a barbed-wire head—

Just a bad dream.

Now, Max gazed at the griffin and shivered, hoping the rest of the dream wouldn't come along with the griffin. He hadn't liked the rain of blood at all.

Max blinked, expecting the griffin to vanish. It remained, gleaming. Fulsome. Something hungry . . .

The griffin noticed Max watching. It straightened, fluttered its two-meter wingspread, wingtips flashing in the morning light slanting through the broad picture window, and said, "Well, what do you want of me?" It had a strangely musical, male voice.

"Whuh?" said Max blearily. "Me? Want with *you?*" Was it a holograph? But it looked so solid . . . and he could hear its claws rasping the bedpost.

"I heard your call," the griffin went on. "It was too loud, and then it was too soft. You really haven't got the hang of mind-sending yet. But I heard and I came. Who are you and why did you call me?"

"Look, I didn't—" He stopped, and smiled. "Sandra. Sandra Klein in Special Effects, right? This is *her* little cuteness. Damn



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that woman. She's trying to shake me up with her pop psychology. Her roundabout method for seduction. Telling me I live my parts too much. Well, fly back to her and tell her I saw the shrink and he said that maybe, sure, I escape into the holoscenes but that doesn't mean I'm losing my identity to the parts I play. It's just method acting. So this little test of my sanity is pointless . . ." He yawned and sat up. "She outdid herself with you, I must admit. You're a marvel of engineering. Damn." The griffin was about a meter high. It gripped the bedpost with metallic eagle's claws; it sat on its haunches, and its lion's forepaws—from a lion of some polished argent alloy—rested on its pin-feathered knees. The pin-feathers looked like sweepings from a machine-shop. The griffin had a lion's head, but an eagle's beak replaced a muzzle. Its feathered chest rose and fell.

"A machine that breathes . . ." Max murmured.

"Machine?" The griffin's opalescent eyes glittered warningly. Its wire-tufted lion's tail swished. "It's true my semblance is all alloys and plastics and circuitry. But I assure you I am not an example of what you people presume to call 'artificial intelligence.' "

"Ah." Max felt cold, and pulled the bedlcothes up to cover his goose-pimpled shoulders. "Sorry." *Don't make it mad.* "Sandra didn't send you?"

It snorted. " 'Sandra'! Good Lord, no."

"I . . ." Max's throat was dry. "I saw you in a dream." He felt odd. Like he'd taken a drug that couldn't make up its mind if it were a tranquilizer or a psychedelic.

"You saw me in a dream?" The griffin cocked its head attentively. "Who else was in this dream?"

"Oh there were—*things*. A rain of blood. A castle that was there and wasn't there. A man—it looked like he was made of . . . of hot metal. And his head was all of wire. I had a series of dreams that were . . . Well, things like that."

"If you dreamed those things, then my coming here is ordained. You act as if you honestly don't know *why* I'm here." It blinked, tiny metal shutters closing with a faint *clink*. "But you're not much *surprised* by me. Most humans would have run shrieking from the room by now. You accept me."

Max shrugged. "Maybe. But you haven't told me why you're here. You said it was—ordained?"

"*Planned* might be a better word. I can tell you that I am Flare, and I am a Conservative Protectionist, a High Functionary in the Fiefdom of Lord Viridian. And you—if you're human—must be



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wild talent. At least. You transmitted the mindsend in your sleep, unknown to your conscious mind. I should have guessed from the confused signal. Well well well. Such things are outside the realm of my expertise. You might be one of the Concealed. We'll see, at the meeting. First, I've got to have something to eat. You people keep food in 'the kitchen,' I think. That would be through that hallway . . ."

The griffin of shining metal fluttered from the bedpost, alighted on the floor with a light clattering, and hopped into the kitchen, out of sight.

Max got out of bed, thinking: He's right. I should be at least disoriented. But I'm not. I *have* been expecting him.

Especially since the dreams started. And the dreams began a week after he'd taken on the role of Prince Red Mark. He'd named the character himself—there'd been last moment misgivings about the original name chosen by the scripters, and he'd blurted, "How about 'Prince Red Mark'?" And the producer went for it, one of the whims that shape show business. Four tapings for the first two episodes, and then the dreams commenced. Sometimes he'd dream he was Prince Red Mark; other times a flash of heat lightning; or a ripple of wind, a breeze that could think and feel, swishing through unseeable gardens of invisible blooms . . . And then the dreams became darker, fiercer, so that he awoke with his fists balled, his eyes wild, sweat cold on his chin. Dreams about griffins and rains of blood and sieges by wretched things. The things that flew, the things with claws.

He'd played Prince Red Mark for seven episodes now. He'd been picked for his athletic build, his thick black hair, and his air of what the P.R. people called "aristocratic detachment." Other people called it arrogance.

Max Whitman had found, to his surprise, he hadn't had to *act* the role. When he played Prince Red Mark, he *was* Prince Red Mark. Pure and simple . . . The set-hands would make fun of him, when they thought he couldn't hear, because he'd forget to step out of the character between shootings. He'd swagger about the set with his hand on the pommel of his sword, emanating Royal Authority.

This morning he didn't feel much like Prince Red Mark. He felt sleepy and confused and mildly threatened. He stretched, then turned toward the kitchen, worried by certain sinister noises: claws on glass. Splashings. Wet, slapping sounds. He burst out, "Damn, it got into my aquarium!" He hurried to the kitchen. "Hey—oh, hell. My fish." The griffin was perched beside the ten-



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gallon aquarium on the breakfast bar. Three palm-sized damselfish were gasping, dying on the wet blue-tile floor. The griffin fluttered to the floor, snipped the fish neatly into sections with its beak, and gobbled them just as an eagle would have. The blue tile puddled with red. Max turned away, saddened but not really angry. "Was that necessary?"

"It's my nature. I was hungry. When we're bodied, we have to eat. I can't eat those dead things in your refrigerator. And after some consideration I decided it would be best if I didn't eat *you*. . . . Now, let's go to the meeting. And don't say, 'What meeting?' "

"Okay. I won't."

"Just take a fast cab to 862 Haven, apartment seventeen. I'll meet you on their balcony . . . wait. Wait. I'm getting a send. They're telling me—it's a message for *you*." It cocked its head to one side as if listening. "They tell me I must apologize for eating your fish. Apparently you have some unusual level of respect in their circle." It bent its head. "I apologize. And they say you are to read a letter from 'Carstairs.' It's been in your computer's letter-sorter for two weeks under *personal* and you keep neglecting to punch for it. Read it. That's the send. . . . Well then . . ." The griffin, fluttering its wings, hopped into the living room. The French doors opened for it as if slid back by some ghostly hand. It went to the balcony, crouched, then sprang into the air and soared away. He thought he heard it shout something over its shoulder at him: something about Prince Red Mark.

It was a breezy morning, feeling like spring. The sun came and went.

Max stood under the rain-shelter in the gridcab station on the roof of his apartment building. The grid was a webwork of metal slats and signal contacts, braced by girders and upheld by the buildings that jutted through the finely woven net like mountaintops through a cloud-field. Thousands of wedge-shaped cabs and private gridcars hummed along the grid in as many different directions.

Impatiently, Max once more thumbed the green call button on the signal stanchion. An empty cab, cruising by on automatic pilot, was dispatched by the Uptown area's traffic computer; it detached from the feverishly interlacing main traffic swarm and arced neatly into the pick-up bay under the rain-shelter.

Max climbed inside and inserted his Unicard into the cab's creditor. The small terminal's screen acknowledged his bank account and asked, "Where to?" Max tapped his destination into the



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keyboard: the cab's computer, through the data-feed contacts threaded into the grid, gave the destination to the main computer, which drove the cab from the bay and out onto the grid. The computer kept track of every car on the grid; here and there were currents of traffic; an individual cab might cut right through one of these without slowing, the computer calculating the available aperture in the traffic flow to thousandths of a second. Accidents were *almost* unknown.

*You are to read a letter from Carstairs,* the griffin had said.

He'd met Carstairs at a convention of fantasy fans. Carstairs had hinted he was doing "some rather esoteric research" for Duke University's parapsychology lab. Carstairs had made Max nervous—he could feel the man following him, watching him, wherever he went in the convention hotel. So he'd deliberately ignored the letter. But he hadn't gotten around to erasing it.

As the cab flashed across the city, weaving in and out of the peaks of skyscrapers, over the narrow parks that had taken the place of the Avenues, Max punched a request to tie in with his home computer. The cab charged his bank account again, tied him in, and he asked his records system to print out a copy of the letter from Carstairs. He scanned the letter, focusing first on:

". . . when I saw you at the convention I knew the Hidden Race had chosen to favor you. They were there, standing at your elbow, invisible to you—invisible to me too, except in certain lights, and when I concentrate all my training on looking. . . ."

Max shivered, and thought: *A maniac.*

He skipped ahead, to: ". . . You'll remember, perhaps, back in the Eighties, people were talking about a 'plasma-body' that existed within our own physiological bodies, an independently organized but interrelated skein of subatomic particles; this constituted, it was supposed, the so-called *soul.* It occurred to some of us that if this plasma body could exist in so cohesive a form within an organism, and could survive for transmigration after the death of that organism, then perhaps a race of creatures, creatures who seem to us to be 'bodiless,' could exist alongside the embodied creatures without humanity's knowing it. This race does exist, Max. It accounts for those well-documented cases of 'demonic' possession and poltergeists. And for much in mythology. My organization has been studying the Hidden Race—some call them plasmagnomes—for fifteen years. We kept our research secret for a good reason . . ."

Max was distracted by a peculiar noise. A scratching sound from the roof of the cab. He glanced out the window, saw nothing,



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and shrugged. Probably a news-sheet blown by the wind onto the car's roof. He looked again at the letter. ". . . for a good reason. Some of the plasmagnomes are hostile . . . The Hidden Race is very orderly. It consists of about ten thousand plasmagnomes, who live for the most part in the world's 'barren' places. Such places are not barren to them. The bulk of the plasmagnomes are a well-cared-for serf class, who labor in creating base plasma fields, packets of nonsentient energy to be consumed or used in etheric constructions. The upper classes govern, study the various universes, and most of all concern themselves with the designing and elaboration of their Ritual Pavanes. But this monarchist hierarchy is factioned into two distinct opposition parties, the Protectionists and the Exploitationists: they gave us those terms as being 'the closest English equivalent.' The Protectionists are sanctioned by the High Crown and the Tetrarchy of Lords. But lately the Exploitationists have increased their numbers, and they've become harder to police. They have gotten out of hand. And for the first time since a Protectionist walked the Earth centuries ago as 'Merlin' and an Exploitationist as 'Mordred,' certain members of the Hidden Race have taken bodied form among us . . ." Max glanced up again.

The scratching sound from the roof. Louder this time. He tried to ignore it; he wondered why his heart was pounding. He looked doggedly at the letter. ". . . The Exploitationists maintain that humanity is small-minded, destructive of the biosphere, too numerous, and in general suitable only for slavery and as sustenance. If they knew my organization studied them, they would kill me and my associates. Till recently, the Protectionists have prevented the opposition party from taking physical form. It's more difficult for them to affect us when they're unbodied, because our biologic magnetic fields keep them at a distance. . . . Centuries ago, they appeared to us as dragons, sorcerers, fairies, harpies, winged horses, griffins—"

Max leaned back in his seat and slowly shook his head. *Griffins.* He took a deep breath. He could keep telling himself: this could still be a hoax. The griffin *could* have been a machine.

But he knew better. He'd known since he was a boy, really. Even then, certain technicolor-vivid dreams—

He tensed: the phantom scrabbling had come again from overhead. He glimpsed a dark fluttering from the corner of one eye; he turned, thought he saw a leathery wing-tip withdraw from the upper edge of the windowframe.

"Oh God." He decided it might be a good idea to read the rest



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of the letter. Now. Quickly. Best he learn all he could about them. Because the scratching on the roof was becoming a grating, scraping sound. Louder and harsher.

He forced himself to read the last paragraph of the letter. ". . . in the old days they manifested as beast-things, because their appearance is affected by our expectation of them. They enter the visible plane only after filtering through our cultural psyche, the society's collective electromagnetic mental field. And their shapes apparently have something to do with their inner psychologcal make-up—each one has a different self-image. When they become bodied, they manipulate the atoms of the atomic-physical world with plasma-field telekinesis, and shape it into what at least *seem* to be actually functioning organisms, or machines. Lately they take the form of machines—collaged with more ancient imagery—because ours is a machine-minded society. They're myth-robots, perhaps. They're not 'magical' creatures. They're real, with their own subtle metabolisms and physical needs and ecological niche. They have a method of keeping records—in 'closed system plasma fields'—and even constructing housing. Their castles are vast and complex and invisible to us, untouchable and all but undetectable. We can pass through them and not disturb them. The Hidden Race has a radically different relationship to matter, energy—and death. That special relationship is what makes them seem magical to us. . . . Well, Mr. Whitman, we're getting in touch with you to ask you to attend a meeting of those directly involved in plans for defense against the Exploitationists' campaign to—"

He got no further in his reading. He was distracted. Naked terror is a distracting thing.

A squealing sound of ripped metal from just over his head made him cringe in his seat, look up to see claws of polished titanium, claws long as a man's fingers and wickedly curved, slashing the cab's thin roof. The claws peeled the metal back. . . .

Frantically, Max punched a message into the cab's terminal: *Change direction for nearest police station. Emergency priority. I take responsibility for traffic disruption.*

The cab swerved, the traffic parting for it, and took an exit from the grid to spiral down the offramp. It pulled up in the concrete cab-stop at street level, across from a cop just getting out of a patrol car at the police station. Wide-eyed, the cop drew his gun and ran toward the cab.

Claws snatched at Max's shoulders. He opened the cab door, and flung himself out of the car, bolting for shelter.



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Something struck him between the shoulderblades. He staggered. There was an icy digging at his shoulders—he howled. Steel claws sank into his flesh and lifted him off his feet—he could feel the muscles of his shoulders straining, threatening to tear. The claws opened, released him, and he fell face down; he lay for a moment, gasping on his belly. He had a choppy impression of something blue-black flapping above and behind. He felt a tugging at his belt—and then he was lifted into the air; the clawed things carrying him by the belt as if it were a luggage handle.

He was two, three, five meters above the concrete, and spiraling upward. He heard a gunshot, thought he glimpsed the cop fallen, a winged darkness descending on him.

The city whirled into a grey blur. Max heard the regular beat of powerful wings just above. He thought: I'm too heavy. It's not aerodynamically possible.

But he was carried higher still, the flying things making creaking, whipping sounds with their pinions. Otherwise, they were unnervingly silent. Max stopped struggling to free himself. If he broke loose now, he'd fall ten storeys to the street. He was slumped like a rabbit in a hawk's claws, hanging limply, humiliated.

He saw two of the flying things below, now, just climbing into his line of sight. They carried the policeman—a big bald man with a paunchy middle. They carried him between them; one had him by the ankles, the other by the throat. He looked lifeless. Judging by the loll of his head, his neck was broken.

Except for the rush of wind past his face, the pain at his hips where the belt was cutting into him, Max felt numb, once more in a dream. He was afraid, deeply afraid, but the fear had somehow become one with the world, a background noise that one grows used to, like the constant banging from a neighborhood construction site. But when he looked at the things carrying him, he had a chilling sense of *déjà vu*. He remembered them from the dreams. Two mornings before, he'd awakened, mumbling, *"The things that flew, the things with claws . . ."*

They were made of vinyl. Blue-black vinyl, just exactly the stuff seats of cars were made of, stretched over, he guessed, aluminum frames. They were bony, almost skeletal women, with little hard knobs for breasts, their arms merging into the broad, scalloped imitation leather wings. They had the heads of women—with day-glo wigs of green, stiff-plastic bristles—but instead of eyes there were the lenses of Polaroid cameras, one in each socket; and when they opened their mouths he saw, instead of teeth, the blue-grey



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curves of razors following the line of the narrow jaws. Max thought: It's a harpy. A vinyl harpy.

One of the harpies, three meters away and a little below, turned its vinyl head, its camera lenses glittering, to look Max in the face; it opened its mouth and threw back its head like a dog about to howl and out came the sound of an air-raid warning: GO TO THE SHELTERS. GO IMMEDIATELY TO THE SHELTERS. DO NOT STOP TO GATHER POSSESSIONS. TAKE FAMILY TO THE SHELTERS. BRING NOTHING. FOOD AND WATER WILL BE PROVIDED. GO IMMEDIATELY—

And two others took it up: GO IMMEDIATELY— in a sexless, emotionless tone of authority. TAKE FAMILY TO THE SHELTERS—

And Max could tell that, for the harpies, the words had no meaning: it was their way of animal cawing, the territorial declaration of their kind.

They couldn't have been in the air more than ten minutes —flapping unevenly over rooftops, bits and pieces of the city churning by below—when they began to descend. They were going down beyond the automated zone. They entered Edgetown, what used to be the South Bronx. People still sometimes drove combustion cars here, on the pot-holed, cracked streets, when they could get contraband gasoline; here policemen were rarely seen; here the corner security cameras were always smashed, the sidewalks crusted with trash, and two-thirds of the buildings deserted.

Max was carried down toward an old-fashioned tar rooftop; it was the roof of a five-story building, wedged in between three taller ones. All four looked derelict and empty; the building across the street showed a few signs of occupation: laundry in the airshaft, one small child on the roof. The child, a little black girl, watched without any sign of surprise. Max felt a little better, seeing her.

Where the shadows of the three buildings intersected on the fourth, in the deepest pocket of darkness, there was a small outbuilding; it was the rooftop doorway into the building. The door hung brokenly to one side. A cherry-red light pulsed just inside the doorway, like hate in a nighted soul.

Max lost sight of the red glow as the vinyl harpies turned, circling for a landing. The rooftop rushed up at him. There was a sickening moment of freefall when they let go. He fell three meters to the rooftop, struck on the balls of his feet, plunged forward, shoulder-rolled to a stop. He gasped, trying to get his breath back. He ached in his ankles and the soles of his feet.



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He took a deep breath and stood, swaying, blinking. He found he was staring into the open doorway. Within, framed by the dusty, dark entrance to the stairway, was a man made of red-hot steel. The heat-glow was concentrated in his torso and arms. He touched the wooden frame of the doorway—and it burst into flame. The harpies capered about the tar rooftop, leaping atop chimneys and down again, stretching their wings to flap, cawing, booming, GO IMMEDIATELY TO THE SHELTERS, GO IMMEDIATELY, GO GO GO . . .

The man made of hot metal stepped onto the roof. The harpies quieted, cowed. They huddled together, behind him, cocking their heads and scratching under their wings with pointed chins. To one side lay the lifeless body of the policeman, its back toward Max; the corpse's head had been twisted entirely around on its neck; one blue eye was open, staring lifelessly; the man's tongue was caught between clamped teeth, half severed.

For a moment all was quiet, but for the rustling of wings and the crackling of the small fire on the outbuilding.

The man of hot chrome wore no clothes at all. He was immense, nearly two-and-a-half meters tall, and smooth as the outer hull of a factory-new fighter-jet. He was seamless—except for the square gate on his chest, with the little metal turn-handle on it. The gate was precisely like the door of an incinerator; in the center of the gate was a small, thick pane of smoke-darkened glass, through which blue-white fires could be seen burning restlessly. Except for their bright metal finish, his arms and legs and stylized genitals looked quite human. His head was formed of barbed wire—a densely woven wire sculpture of a man's head, cunningly formed to show grim, aristocratic features. There were simply holes for eyes, behind which red fires flickered in his hollow head; now and then flames darted from the eye-holes to play about his temples and then recede; his scalp was a crest of barbs; his pointed eyebrows and ears were shaped of barbs. Grey smoke gusted from his mouth when he spoke to the harpies: "Feed me." The wire lips moved like a man's; the wire jaw seemed to work smoothly. "Feed me, while I speak to this one." He stepped closer to Max, who cringed back from the heat. "I am Lord Thanatos." A voice like metal rending.

Max knew him.

One of the harpies moved to the corpse of the policeman; it took hold of the limp arm, put one stunted foot on the cop's back, and began to wrench and twist. It tore the corpse's arm from its shoulder and dragged it to Thanatos, leaving a trail of red blood on



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black tar. The harpy reached out with its free hand and turned the handle on its Lord's chest. The door swung open; an unbearable brightness flared in the opening; ducking its head, turning its eyes from the rapacious light, the vinyl harpy stuffed the cop's arm, replete with digital watch and blue coat-sleeve, into the inferno, the bosom of Thanatos. Sizzlings and poppings and black smoke unfurling. And the smell of roasting flesh. Max's stomach recoiled; he took another step backward. He watched, feeling half paralyzed, as the harpies scuttled back and forth between the corpse and Thanatos, slowly dismembering and disemboweling the dead policeman, feeding the pieces into the furnace that was their Lord.

And his fire burned more furiously; his glow increased.

"This is how it will be," said Thanatos. "You will serve me. You can look on me, Max Whitman, and upon my servants, and you do not go mad. You do not run howling away. Because you are one of those who has always known about us, in some way. We met on the dream-plane once, you and I, and I knew you for what you were, then. You can serve me, and still live among men. You will be my emissary. You will be shielded from the cowards who would prevent my entry into your world. You will go to certain men, the few who control the many. The wealthy ones. You will tell them about a great source of power: Lord Thanatos. I will send fiends and visitations to beset their enemies. Their power will grow, and they will feed me, and my power will grow. This is how it will be."

As he finished speaking, another harpy flapped down from the sky, dropping a fresh corpse into the shadows. It was a young Hispanic in a smudged white suit. Thanatos opened the wiry mouth of his hollow head and sighed; blue smoke smelling of munitions factories dirtied the air. "They always kill them, somehow, as they bring them to me. I cannot break them of it. They always kill the humans. Men are more pleasurable to consume when there is life left in them. My curse is this: I'm served by half-minds."

Max thought: Why didn't the harpies kill me, then?

The vinyl harpies tore an arm from the sprawled dead man, and fed it into their master's fire. Their camera-lens eyes caught the shine of the fire. Thanatos looked at Max. "You have not yet spoken."

And Max thought: *Say anything. Anything to get the hell away.* "I'll do just what you ask. Let me go and I'll bring you lives. I'll be your, uh, your emissary."



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Another long, smoky sigh. "You're lying. I was afraid you'd be loyal. Instinct of some sort, I suppose."

"Loyal to *who?*"

"I can read you. You see only the semblance I've chosen. But I see past your semblance. You cannot lie to one of us. I see the lie in you unfolding like the blossoming of a poisonous purple orchid. You cannot lie to a Lord."

He licked barbed wire lips with a tongue of flame.

So they will kill me, Max thought. They'll feed me into this monstrosity! Is that a strange death? An absurd death? No stranger than dying by nerve-gas on some Israeli battlefield; no more absurd than my uncle Danny's death: he drowned in a big vat of fluorescent pink paint.

"You're not going to die," said Thanatos. "We'll keep you in stasis, forever imprisoned, unpleasantly alive."

What happened next made Max think of a slogan stenciled on the snout of one of the old B-12 bombers: *Death From Above.* Because something silvery flashed down from above and struck at the two harpies bending over the body of the man in the smudged white suit . . . both harpies were struck with a terrible impact, sent broken and lifeless over the edge of the roof.

The griffin pulled up from its dive, raking the tar roof, and soared over the burning outbuilding and up for another pass. The remaining harpies rose to meet it.

Other figures were converging on the roof, coming in a group from the North. One was a man who hovered without wings; he seemed to levitate. His body was angelic, his skin dazzling white; he wore a loincloth made of what looked like aluminum foil. His head was a man's, haloed with blond curls—but where his eyes and forehead should have been was a small television screen, projecting from the bone of his skull. On the screen, projecting from the bone of his skull. On the screen was a TV image of a man's eyes, looking about; it was as if he saw *from* the TV screen. Two more griffins arrived, one electroplated gold, another of nickel, and just behind them came a woman who drifted like a bit of cotton blown on the breeze. She was shapely, resembling Mother Mary, but nude, a plastic Madonna made of the stuff of which inflatable beach-toys are made; she was glossy, and striped in wide bands of primary colors. She seemed insubstantial as a soap-bubble, but when she struck at a vinyl harpy it reeled back, turning end over end to fall, senseless. Flanking her were two miniature helicopters—helicopters no bigger than horses. The lower section of each helicopter resembled a medieval dragon



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figured in armored metal, complete with clawed arms in place of landing runners. Each copter's cab was conventionally shaped—but no driver sat behind the windows; and just below those sinister windows was a set of chrome teeth in a mouth opening to let loose with great peals of electronically amplified laughter. The dragon copters dived to attack the harpies, angling their whirring blades to shred the vinyl wings.

Thanatos grated a command, and from the burning doorway behind him came seven bats big as vultures, with camera-lens eyes and sawing electric knives for teeth and wings of paper-thin aluminum.

Max threw himself to the roof, coughing in the smoke of the growing fire; the bats whipped close over his head and climbed, keening, to attack Our Lady of the Plastics.

Two dog-sized spiders made of high-tension rubbery synthetics, their clashing mandibles forged of the best Solingen steel, raced on whirring copper legs across the roof to intercept the angel with television eyes. The angel alighted and turned to gesture urgently to Max. The spiders clutched at the angel's legs and dragged him down, slashed bloody hunks from his ivory arms.

Max saw Lord Thanatos catch a passing griffin by the tail and slam it onto the roof; he clamped the griffin in his white-hot hands. It shrieked and began to melt.

Two metal bats collided head-on with a copter dragon and all three disintegrated in a shower of blue sparks. Our Lady of the Plastics struck dents into the aluminum ribs of the vinyl harpies who darted at her, slashed, and boomed GO IMMEDIATELY, bellowing it in triumph as she burst open—but they recoiled in dismay, flapping clumsily out of reach, when she re-formed, gathering her fragments together, making herself anew in mid-air.

Max sensed that the real battle was fought in some other dimension of subatomic physicality, with a subtler weaponry; he was seeing only the distorted visual echoes of the actual struggle.

The spiders were wrapping the angel's legs with chords of spun glass. He gave a mighty wrench and threw them off, levitating out of their reach, shouting at Max: "Take your life! You—"

"SILENCE HIM!" Thanatos bellowed, stabbing a hot finger at the angel. And instantly two of the harpies plummeted to sink their talons in the throat of the angel with television eyes. They tore at him, made a gouting, ragged wreckage of his white throat—and Max blinked, seeing a phosphorescent mist, the color of translucent turquoise, issuing from the angel's slack mouth as he fell to the ground.



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I'm seeing his plasma body escape, Max thought. I'm realizing my talent.

He saw the blue phosphorescence, vaguely man-shaped, drift to hang in the air over the body of the dead Hispanic. It settled, enfolding the corpse. Possessing it.

*Sans* its right arm, half its face clawed away, the corpse stood. It swayed, shuddered, spoke with shredded lips. "Max, kill yourself and lib—"

Thanatos lunged at the wavering corpse, closed hot metal fingers around its throat, burned its voice-box into char. The corpse slumped.

But Max stood. His dreams were coming back to him—or was someone sending them back? Someone mindsending: *You were of the Concealed.*

Thanatos turned from the battle, scowling, commanding: "Take him! Bind him, carry him to safety!" The spiders, gnawing on the corpse of the angel with television eyes, moved reluctantly away from their feeding and crept toward Max. A thrill of revulsion went through him. He forced himself forward. He knelt, within the spiders' reach. "Don't hurt him!" Thanatos bellowed. "Take care that he does not—"

But he did. He embraced a spider, clasping it to him as if it

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were something dear; and used its razor-sharp mandibles to slash his own throat. He fell, spasming, and knew inexpressible pain; and numbness, and greyness. And a shattering white light.

He was dead. He was alive. He was standing over his own body, liberated. He reached out, and, with his plasma-field, extinguished the fire on the outbuilding. Instantly.

The battle noises softened, then muted—the combatants drew apart. They stood or crouched or hovered silently, watching him and waiting. They knew him for Prince Red Mark, a sleeping Lord of the Plasmagnomes, one of seven Concealed among humanity years before, awaiting the day of awakening, the hour when they must emerge to protect those the kin of Thanatos would slaughter for the eating.

He was arisen, the first of the Concealed. He would awaken the others, those hidden, sleeping in the hearts of the humble and the unknown. In old women and tired, middle-aged soldiers and—and there was one, hidden in a young black girl, not far away.

Thanatos shuddered, and squared himself for the battle of wills.

Max, Lord Red Mark, scanned the other figures on the rooftop. Now he could see past their semblances, recognize them as interlacing networks of rippling wavelength, motion that is thought, energy equal to will. He reached out, reached past the semblance of Lord Thanatos.

A small black girl, one Hazel Johnson, watched the battle from a rooftop across the street. She was the only one who saw it; she had the only suitable vantage.

Hazel Johnson was just eight years old, but she was old enough to know that the scene should have surprised her, should have sent her yelling for Momma. But she had seen it in a dream, and she'd always believed that dreams were real.

And now she saw that the man who'd thrown himself on the spider had died, and his body had given off a kind of blue phosphorescence; and the blue cloud had formed into something solid, a gigantic shape that towered over the nasty-looking wire-head of hot metal.

All the flying things had stopped flying. They were watching the newcomer.

The newcomer looked, to Hazel, like one of the astronauts you saw on TV coming home from the space station; he wore one of those spacesuits they wore, and he even had the U.S. flag stitched on one of his sleeves. But he was a whole lot bigger than an astronaut, or any man she'd ever seen. He must have been four



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meters tall. And now she saw that he didn't have a helmet like a regular astronaut had. He had one of those helmets that the Knights of the Round Table wore, like she saw in the movie on TV. The knight in the spacesuit was reaching out to the man made of hot metal. . . .

Lord Red Mark was distantly aware that one of his own was watching from the rooftop across the street. Possibly Lady Day, asleep in the body of a small human being; a small person who didn't know, yet, that she wasn't really human after all.

Now he reached out and closed one of his gloved hands around Lord Thanatos's barbed-wire neck (that's how it looked, to the little girl watching from across the street) and held him fast, though the metal of that glove began to melt in the heat. Red Mark held him, and with the other hand opened the incinerator door, and reached his hand into the fire that burned in the bosom of his enemy—

And snuffed out the flame, like a man snuffing a candle with his thumb.

The metal body remained standing, cooling, forever inert. The minions of Lord Thanatos fled squalling into the sky, pursued by the Protectionists, abandoning their visible physicality, becoming once more unseeable. And so the battle was carried into another realm of being.

Soon the rooftop was empty of all but a corpse, and a few broken harpies, and the shell of Thanatos, and Lord Red Mark.

Red Mark turned to look directly at the little girl on the opposite roof. He levitated, rose evenly into the air, and drifted to her. He alighted beside her and took off his helm. Beneath was a light that smiled. He was beautiful. He said, "Let's go find the others."

She nodded, slowly, beginning to wake. But the little-girl part of her, the human shell, said, "Do I have to die too? Like you did?"

"No. That was for an emergency. There are other ways."

"I don't have to die now?"

"Not now and . . ." The light that was a smile grew brighter. "Not ever. You'll never die, my Lady." ●

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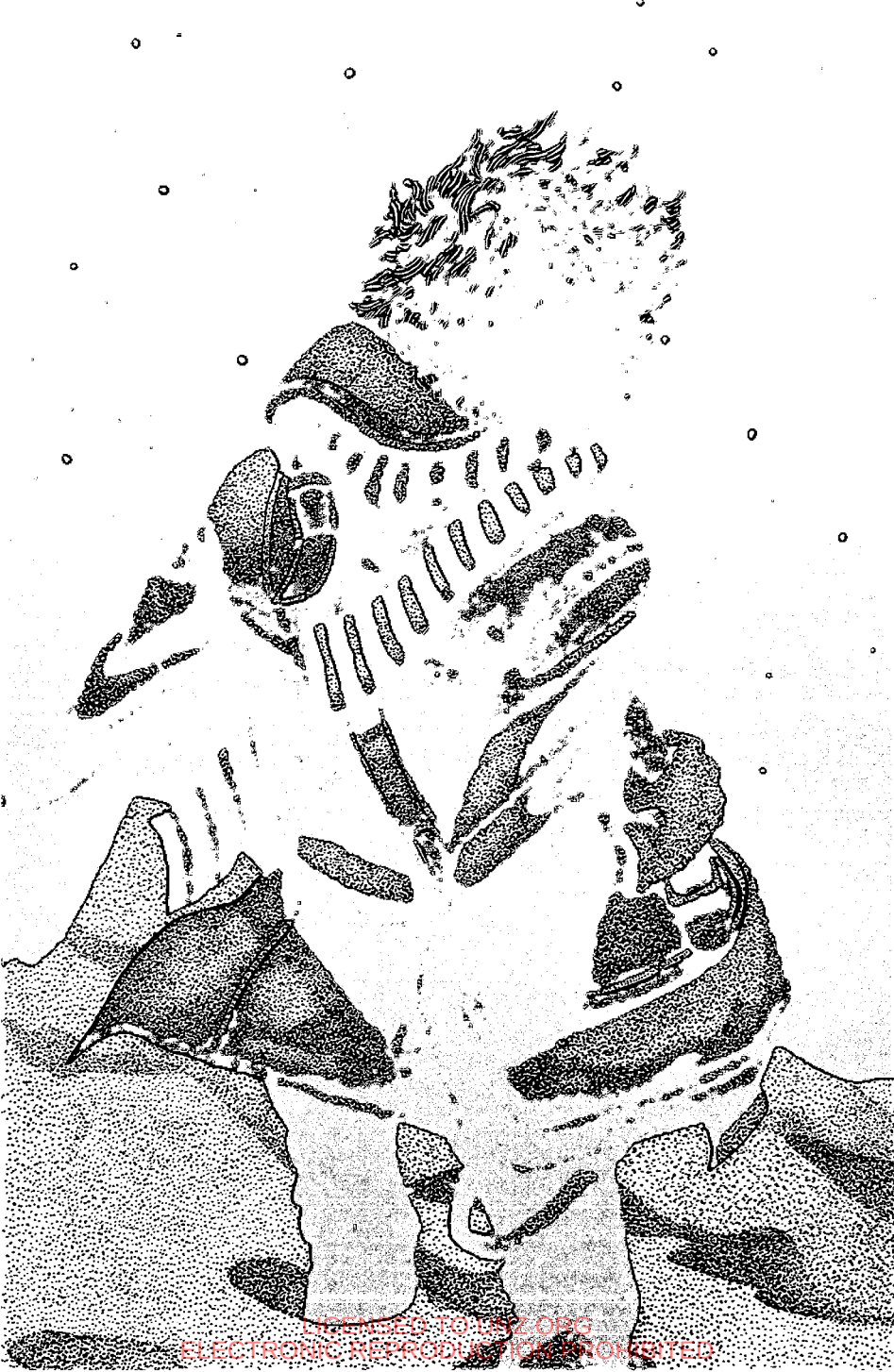

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# BELLING MARTHA

by Leigh Kennedy

Leigh Kennedy's latest book, *The Aventine*, was released in January 1982 by Del Rey Books. This is her second appearance in *IAsfm*. The first, "Speaking[10] to Others[20]," appeared in our June 8, 1981, issue.

art: Janet Aulisio

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Martha was looking for her daddy.

By the time she saw the lights of the cabins on the stark hillsides outside the gates of Austin, she'd nearly forgotten her goal. Especially as she knew not to travel the road, it had been enough to survive one hill, the next, and then another . . .

She sniffed the frigid wind blowing toward her from the notorious stove vents of those who lived just outside the city.

Someone was roasting human flesh in their fires.

The thin leather boots issued by the Central Texan Christian Reform Camp were scant protection for slogging through two feet of snow. Breaking the icy crust had made her shins sore, even through her jeans. Wind flapped her sleeves and collar and battered her ears until a dull ache throbbed through her skull. She'd stopped three times on the way from Smithville to build a fire and revive her feet, and sleep a bit.

The aroma quickened her progress. It had been a long time since Martha had smelled that particular odor. The biscuits and apples she'd carried with her—stolen from the camp kitchen—had long ago been eaten.

The closer she struggled toward home and warmth, the more stinging the dry snow felt. Gradually, she could discern details of the cabin she'd spent most of her life in—the heavy drapes at the window, the flat boulder that she used to perch on while she watched her father chop wood, the daub patches on the east wall.

Wise enough not to approach the house from the road, where stray travelers, legal or not, were watched with interest, she came upon the rear door. She pushed the door open and stepped inside.

"Daddy?"

The house had changed only a little—different colors and smells; she noticed that her small bed was gone from beside the fireplace. On the stone of the hearth, a cracked head and shoulder lay with its hair stiff and awry. Strips of flesh hung from hooks above the fireplace, and a kettle bubbled on the high grate above the fire. The meat smelled old. It was apparently not a kill, but probably a body tossed out the gates because there was no one to pay for a burial inside the city.

She heard a sound behind her.

"Dad . . ." she said, turning.

A woman poised toward Martha, holding a garroting wire in her hands. Martha stepped back and knew as she spoke that she was imitating the cool of her father's manner. "Hey, neighbor," she said.

The woman's eyes narrowed. She was still ready to strike. Mar-



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tha would have to work fast to get out of the situation if the woman was a Crazy.

"Neighbor?" the woman repeated.

"What are you doing in my house?" Martha said.

The woman smiled wryly. "Like hell *yours,* kid. I live here."

Now Martha speculated. It had been over a year since her father's last letter had reached her at the camp. Could it be that he'd found himself a companion? "With my daddy?" she asked.

"Don't think so," the woman said. Her hands lowered a bit. "Not unless the old fella hasn't told me all."

"My daddy's Harry Jim Skill."

"Well, then, your daddy ain't here," the woman said irritably. "What are you doing out here anyway?"

"Looking for my—"

"Yeah, okay," the woman said. She unwound the wire from her hands and stuffed it into her pocket. "He didn't teach you a bit of sense, did he? If you're really neighbors with folks like us, I'll let you go. Go on now!"

Martha wasn't ready to have the decision made for her. She couldn't believe her father was not nearby. She shouted, "Harry Jim!"

"You little fish, I'll stew you. . . ." the woman said, walking toward her again.

The back door swung open. Martha swiveled to look. The face could have been handsome or beetle-like, she didn't notice, but it was wrong, all wrong, and that made it horrible.

"Git!" the woman shouted, and Martha hesitated only long enough to shake the uncertainty of terror out of her bones, then pushed through the front door.

As soon as she'd come in sight of the city gates, she knew she'd lost her caution. She stopped. Before her was the battered sign on a brick wall just outside the gates:

WELCOME TO AUSTIN, TEXAS STATE CAPITAL

Above her, the sentry leaned out of his watchbooth, sighting her down his gun barrel. "Don't move," he said through a loudspeaker.

Martha stood completely still. For the first thirteen years of her life—until she'd been taken to the camp—she had seen the walls of Austin, but she'd never been so close as now.

"Drop that bag."

Martha let her bag of possessions slip from her hand onto the frosty mud.

Still, the guard kept his weapon on her. "Do you have a pass?"



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She started to say no, but thought better of it. "I got jumped in the back of a government truck. They stole my pass, then shoved me out. Been walking for three days."

The sentry paused. After a moment, the box that he stood in eased down the wall on a track. When it was about a meter from the ground, it stopped with a mechanical bounce. One of the spotlights atop the wall swiveled until it shone directly on her. She raised her hand to shield her eyes.

"Throw your bag over here."

Martha picked up her bag and flung it toward the box. The sentry moved cautiously, watching her, and stepped sideways to pick the bag up with a hook. He examined it inside his box. "Take your clothes off."

"It's too cold!"

"Do you want inside the city?"

She peeled everything, including her boots, shivering so hard that she could barely throw the heap toward him. After a few moments, the voice in the loudspeaker said, "Come in." The gate opened just a bit; Martha squeezed through the opening. Someone grabbed her arm as she entered. Peripherally, she saw the sentry box rising up the wall again.

She stood naked inside the gates of the city—for the first time. Trampled pathways glittered coldly under the bowed heads of streetlamps. Small houses shouldered one another as if for comfort, their windows dark. The wind whined eerily through broken panes of glass. The sound of loose metal clanged in the wind.

She'd imagined cities to be clean havens for good folk, but it looked more miserable than outside to her. Still, she thought, surveying all the possible places for residence, there must be a lot of food here. . . .

The soldier who had her arm stared hard at her face. "What's your name?"

Martha blinked. "Uh . . . Martha . . ."

"Hey, Carrie," called the sentry above. "Take my post awhile."

"Shit," the soldier with Martha muttered. "Come on down," she said impatiently. As the other hurried down a metal stair, she took on a warning tone. "You're going to get caught one of these days, you horny dog. Someday the governor's daughter will come through WP."

"This isn't the governor's daughter," he said, taking Martha's hand. "Come on, now, I got to check you in. You want in the city, right? You got relatives?"

As he pushed her toward a metal shed, Martha said, "Don't



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know if they're still in the city." She was getting hazy from the cold and from being shoved around.

"We'll just find out in a little while." He opened the door. In the shed was a table with tools, greasy notices pinned on a board, and the kind of radio she'd seen in Brother Guy's office at the camp. Against one wall, a cot listed in a mended way.

"Lay down, spread your thighs. Ever done this before?" he asked, unbuckling his coat.

Martha tested the cot and figured it would hold her. "Do I have to?"

"Sure would make things easier for you, sweetie."

She shrugged.

The jeep shot through the city, sometimes leaping off crevasses in the streets, sometimes jerking to avoid potholes, sometimes dipping one wheel in a hole with a thump. Martha sat beside the policeman driving, hunched over the bag in her lap.

They'd found her Aunt Jenny Skill in the directory. Martha couldn't remember much about what her father's sister had become, except she'd married in the city and either left or lost her husband. The check-in police told her that if her Aunt Jenny couldn't (or wouldn't) take her in, she would have to go to the WP camp.

Martha knew vaguely about WP camps. Sometimes they kept people doing construction or working in government janitorial jobs for years. One could get out by playing political or buying a bureaucrat's attention. Martha figured her aunt might know where her father was; even if he'd gotten stuck in a camp himself, she could find him. He would help her.

Wouldn't he?

She thought about the last time she'd seen him. . . .

"Renounce your ways!"

She'd run outside to see the battered truck with a chicken wire cage on the back. Standing inside the cage was an old woman with two apples in one hand and a potato in the other. Though she was grey and fragile, when she spoke to Martha straight through the cage, she had a strong voice.

"Renounce your ways!" she shouted, then pointed to Martha's father standing just behind her. "Come with us to the Lord's commune. We have food, we have warmth. Don't let your child be damned by your sinning ways!"

"Martha," her father said, but then was silent.



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"Look at all the food," Martha said, noticing the lumpy bags of potatoes, apples, beans, and cheeses with heavy rinds in boxes, loaves of bread wrapped in paper.

"Forty miles to happiness," the woman shouted. "Forty miles to regular meals, a warm bed, and God-given peace of mind." She beckoned to Martha with an apple, unlatching the door of the cage. "You won't have to eat the flesh of your brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters in God's eyes! Renounce your ways! We understand! We forgive! We will save you!"

"Martha," her father said again with a voice as soft as snowfall, "do you want to go?"

Martha looked at more food than she'd ever seen at once in her life. She thought of the nights that her father wept and sighed after an especially trying capture and kill. She was still young enough to believe that a different life meant a better life, and if her father was willing . . .

"Yes!"

"Come, child," the woman said, "come with us to pray with thanks for salvation."

Martha caught hold of the tailgate of the truck and boosted herself up to the cage door. Then she looked over her shoulder and saw that her father was standing still, just watching.

"Daddy!"

The woman grabbed her shoulders and pulled her headlong into the truck, shouting, "Take off, Brother Guy!"

The truck lurched. Martha skinned her knees falling forward. She crawled up to look out at the figure standing down the road and screamed, "Let me out, let me out, you old bitch!"

And far away, her father yelled her name through cupped hands. "Martha, I love you!" he said.

From the jeep she could see broken-down houses. To her left, she saw the tall outline of buildings she'd seen distantly for years. They seemed close and large, and yet still a coherent shape.

A wish came to Martha—perhaps if she couldn't find her father, maybe her aunt could take his place.

After she'd first been taken to the Christian camp, she'd been bitter and angry, feeling deserted by the only person that had ever meant anything to her. His few letters to her there had eventually made her realize that he had thought it was the best thing for her. During the numb years at the camp, Martha mouthed the phrases and sang the verses, but they hadn't touched



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her. She'd made adequate, tentative friendships, but none so profound that she would grieve at separation.

She leaned back and slid down the seat, face turned outward to passively watch the scenery. She'd seen pictures in old books of cities, but all this seemed a ruined imitation. Dried weeds poked out of the thin crust of snow. Parts of houses had been hacked away, probably for firewood or to patch other houses. Fleetingly, she saw someone prying a windowframe from an abandoned garage. She saw one tree enclosed within a fence.

Slowing down, the driver for the first time spoke to Martha. "Is this it?"

Martha looked at the house beyond the posts of what had once been a chain-link fence. The house was a square two-story with symmetrical windows. "I don't know," she said.

She followed the policeman up the path to the house. The roof overhung the door a bit, but looked chopped away. A layer of gritty snow covered the boxes and other odd shapes on the porch. The policeman pounded on the door and turned toward the street uneasily.

When the door opened, four people stood behind a heavy mesh. Others looked through the parted drapes. The policeman unfolded a piece of paper and held it out. "Is there a Jennifer Skill here?"

It reminded Martha of the time she'd first arrived at the camp. Faces, faces, looking back at her.

A woman came forward out of the other room and stood behind the mesh. "What do you want?"

Martha couldn't superimpose her father's stories of his childhood companion on this tight-lipped, thin woman.

"This girl claims you'll take her in."

Jenny Skill looked at Martha speculatively. "Who is she?"

"Martha Gail Skill, she says," said the policeman.

"Where's my daddy?" Martha asked her.

No answers came for a moment. The policeman and Martha stared inward and the others stared outward and no one said anything. Jenny reached above her head and there were sounds of metal locks slipping as her hands crept down the side of the mesh.

The door opened. Martha stepped inside and stood behind her aunt. The policeman thrust his notebook in the door. "Sign this," he said. "She has no papers. You'll have to get them for her in ten days or pay the fines."

Jenny only nodded as she signed the paper.

After the policeman left, Jenny took Martha's coat collar be-



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tween her thumb and forefinger and guided her into the living-room. Furniture crowded the room, as if several households' worth of things had to be arranged in a single place.

Fifteen or so people came into the room, some sitting on the sofas or chairs, but most stood around them. Jenny lifted her chin. "She's kin to me and I'll take responsibility for her. You know that she's my brother Harry's kid, but she won't pull anything here." Then Jenny took Martha's jaw in her hand and jerked her face around so that Martha stared straight into Jenny's eyes. "Will you?" she said.

"Where's my daddy?" Martha whispered. She felt a cramping in her lower gut. The bright electric bulb overhead, the strangers all intent on her presence, and Jenny's roughness confused her.

"Poor thing," one of the grannies whispered.

"You just forget about your daddy," Jenny said. "He's not here."

"But where is he?"

"No use worrying about it."

"Now, wait a minute," a man said.

Jenny let go of Martha and for the first time she was able to focus on the people around her. There were two old grannies sitting together. There were several men about her father's age, and even more women. Younger people nearer her own age numbered only about five. Later, she discovered that six children had been put to bed.

The large man who'd spoken shouldered closer. He had an aggressive, troubled kind of look that Martha had seen on some of the Crazies at the camp. "I don't feel safe about having your brother's kid here. Nothing against you, Jenny, but we all know what your brother was, and what's to say—"

"Tell 'em where you've been," Jenny said, nudging Martha.

Martha stood dumbly. She'd heard the word *was* referring to her father. Was? What did it mean?

"She's been in the Christian Reform Camp," Jenny said. "Okay, look, Darren, we'll move Terry out of the closet under the stairs and hang that big brass bell over the door. Anyone will hear her coming out at night. Send her out with the kids to scavenge. If she gets fed like the rest of us, she won't be looking to carve anyone up."

"You'll have to feed her better than that," one of the grannies said.

"Well, where am *I* going to sleep?" one of the young ones asked. She was kind of pretty, but she kept narrowing her eyes at Martha.



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Martha listened vaguely as sleeping places were rearranged. Someone was sent to lock up the knives in the kitchen. Jenny searched Martha's pockets. Sweat formed on Martha's upper lip; she clenched her teeth as her bowels churned nervously.

"Jenny," she said, "what happened to Daddy?"

Jenny turned quickly. "He's dead! Now I don't want to hear another word about it."

Martha nodded slowly. She had expected her to say exactly that, but somehow she couldn't believe that she really had. Her ears buzzed and she felt weak. "I need to go to the john."

"Kaye, take her out back," Jenny said.

A young dark-haired woman shuddered melodramatically. "*Me?*"

"All right, all right," Jenny said impatiently. "Switzer."

A blond, rosy-cheeked young man motioned to Martha. She followed him through the kitchen, which was clean, but dishes, boxes, cans, and bottles crammed together on narrow shelves and utensils and pots hung everywhere there was room. Switzer unbolted the back door. She saw the john and ran for it.

She stayed longer than she needed to, in spite of the cold, rocking back and forth, sobbing. She thought of the last time she'd seen her father, the words he'd written to her about how they would go south together someday when he had money to pass the boundary. She revived old memories of him telling her stories, the little jokes they had with each other, songs he would sing while cooking or sewing, the way he looked when he was "just thinking."

She didn't want to go back inside with those people. At the camp, everyone had done their best to act nice, though the feelings were usually at odds with their behavior.

She stopped crying. She felt dry and cold and used up.

On the way back into the house, Switzer said, "I'm sorry about your father." There was a sort of anger in his voice.

Jenny met her in the kitchen and led her to a dim room lined with several mats. Two small forms lay under blankets, but the rest were flat. "Here. We're giving you a warm place. Keep that in mind." Jenny opened a closet door. A bell jangled. One of the sleeping children sat up. Martha saw that the dark closet was the inverse shape of a stairway, lined with boxes and various shapes, all of which seemed to lean dangerously inward. Jenny urged Martha forward.

The door shut behind her with another jangle, then a bolt slipped into place.



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She sank down, only then realizing her weariness. As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she saw the ghost of her hand against a rough blanket. Voices and footsteps scattered randomly around her. Someone went up the stairs above her.

She was hungry—awfully hungry—now. Beyond her door were so many people.

She knew her own ribs and hipbones and spine as hard places on her body. But there were those in the house who were not so lean. She could crawl from mat to mat and search for their hipbones and find none so sharp as her own.

"People are not food," Brother Guy had said to her on her second day in the camp. "When God gave Moses the laws, he said, 'Thou shalt not kill.' It's better to die of hunger than to kill your fellow man. It is wrong, Martha, *wrong*. You will pay for doing wrong by torment of eternal fire, eternal pain, eternal sorrow in the depths of lonely Hell if you don't get on your knees right this moment and swear—swear!—to God that you were wrong. That you will no longer eat the flesh of humans. That you were an innocent child of circumstances. That you beg His forgiveness. That you repent with a soul full of anguish and remorse. That you will face hunger with a heartful of love for Him! On your knees and pray, Martha! Pray for your soul!"

And Martha had gotten to her knees and prayed, hoping that would relieve all the grief. But over the years, she'd come to recognize that Brother Guy didn't see the world the way she did. In fact, he saw things differently than almost everyone else. Her hope of salvation and fear of an infinite Hell broke little by little, until she behaved the way they expected her to merely out of custom—and respect for the supper table.

Now she was free of that.

When Aunt Jenny fetched her from the closet in the morning, she dragged Martha to a tiny room with a disconnected bathtub. Tepid water still stood from probably two or three others' baths. Martha didn't relish wallowing in scummy water, or that dampness after washing. They hadn't made her wash but every week at the camp.

"Wash your hair, too," Jenny said, closing the door.

She obeyed out of habit. Half way through her bath, someone tossed in a shirt and pair of pants for her, which were slightly large when she dressed. Outside the room, Switzer sat on the floor, apparently waiting for her. "Hungry?" he asked.

Martha knew that her face changed with the suggestion of food.



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Switzer led the way back to the kitchen. Six or seven people crowded the kitchen, fixing their breakfasts, washing up, or passing through and chatting.

Switzer motioned for her to sit. Taking the edge of the bench at the table, she noticed the lull in the conversation. A boy stared at her, but the weak-chinned man resumed eating, and the woman stared out the window. Switzer returned with two bowls of white mealy soup and a chunk of bread. He tore the bread, gave her half, and began to eat rapidly.

As she began to spoon in the cereal, the man glanced toward her with a studied casualness, as if curious about the table manners of her kind.

She didn't waste time on manners.

As she stuffed the last of the bread in her mouth, Switzer said, "Let's go."

"Go?"

"C'mon." He strode across the room. In the entry hall, he put on a coat and knitted cap; his fair hair stuck out around his collar. He wrapped his throat with a cloth sack. Martha found her own coat on a peg.

"Where are we going?" she asked as they walked away from the house. The day was clear but for a few grey clouds in the south, but the sunlight was dulled by a persistent chill breeze.

"Scavenging," he said. He looked at her sidelong. "You've gone scavenging, haven't you?

"Yesterday I brought home a whole door," he said. He sensed Martha's skepticism and touched the bag around his neck. "I chopped it up first, of course." And then he opened his coat and showed her a small axe hanging in the lining of his coat.

They walked without conversation for a long while. All the uninhabited houses she saw had been plundered. Inedible and non-fuel trash hugged chain-link fences. Ahead was the tall yellow tower she'd seen often in the distance.

"This used to be the University," Switzer said.

They passed into an open area which was crowded with hand-built shacks.

"There used to be trees everywhere," he said. "I've seen pictures of this place where all this was green grass except for walkways, and there were trees . . ."

Martha had seen an area covered with trees outside of Smithville once.

"Maybe it will warm up before we have to ruin everything," Switzer said.



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"Warm up?" Martha said. "Hah."

"It might." Switzer slowed down. "I've read that this a temporary thing, not an actual climactic change. An abberation because of those three volcanos and a fluctuation in the sun. If it goes on for another twenty years or so, then it might really be a permanent change, but it *could* warm up." He was straightforward, not fanatical like the Christians; Martha could see that it meant a lot to him.

But she didn't understand what he was saying. "Oh," she said, and squinted.

He smiled vaguely, as if knowing that she didn't follow.

"I don't know any different from now or the good times, anyway," she said. "My daddy told me about how it used to be a little, though. It just sounded like stuff he made up. You know how they talk."

"We'd be happier."

They were walking through the shacks. Martha saw faces listlessly watching from windows that had once been in automobiles. Even inside the scrap metal and cardboard huts with makeshift stovepipes, the occupants' breath condensed in little puffs. Only a few moved around outside their shanties, hands and feet and heads wrapped in rags, nostrils frosted. Martha thought they looked dulled somehow. She'd seen more people inside the city who looked like they belonged in the Other Yard at the camp than she imagined possible.

Even Switzer was subdued as they quietly walked the edge of the village-within-a-city. He glanced uneasily over his shoulder as two, then three men, trailed them as they moved toward the street. Martha flinched when Switzer took her arm, but he held.

"It's slippery here," he said, indicating the steps ahead. Martha figured that was an excuse.

When they had descended, Switzer walked at a faster pace. Martha saw that those who'd been following stood like sentries at the edge of what used to be the campus.

"I thought you should know about this place," he said. "And now you know where *not* to go."

Martha shrugged. "What would they do to *me?*"

He didn't answer.

They walked for a long time. Martha's feet began to grow numb and she had chills between her shoulder blades from the wind. The buildings around them were taller and closer to the street as they moved forward. Fractured glass, abandoned brick and



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concrete—she realized that was the insides of the city she'd only viewed from afar—not the spun-sugar she used to imagine.

"Pigeons," Switzer said, pointing to the roof of a three-story building. "Right in my favorite place, too." He took a slingshot out of his pocket. Martha wondered how many weapons and tools he carried. They scrounged the ground for chunks of concrete and rocks, or chips of metal.

He let loose with a rock. A burst of pigeons came outward in a wave. He loaded and reloaded with dexterity but out of the ten or so birds, only one dropped. They both ran to retrieve it from the middle of the street.

Martha saw that the bird still fluttered and twisted its neck. "Let me," she said, holding her hand out for the slingshot.

Switzer handed it over. She looked up at the ridge just below the roof where the pigeons were settling again. The sky was a flat grey now, the clouds having moved in part way over the city, but it was still bright enough to make her squint. Switzer flushed them again, then she shot with the same speed he had, only this time three pigeons dropped.

"Damn lot of birds here," she said simply, as they walked toward the kill.

"You do all right," he said with admiration.

"I've had to." She remembered her father's coaching—"Right here," he had said, tapping his temple, "hard as you can."

"At the camp?"

"Yeah." She handed him one of her birds so that they each carried two. "They took care of us so that we could hunt, farm, and chop wood for 'em. They've got one of those greenhouses the government gives out to folks they like."

"Why did you leave the camp?"

Martha shrugged. "Just seemed like the right time."

"Were they mean to you?"

Martha looked at the sky. A bleak day altogether. The only vivid color was the pink weather-pinch in Switzer's cheeks. "I don't know. . . . Naw. They just didn't pay much attention unless you got out of line."

"Did you?" he asked, smiling conspiratorially.

"Sometimes."

Martha had been standing in the short-season garden with three others when old Randall fell. He'd had attacks before, but they'd been mild and a few days of resting had usually put him back on his feet.



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This time he pitched face forward into the mud, scattering the basket of asparagus he'd gathered at the fence's edge. The four of them watched, and each of them knew the thoughts of the others without so much as an exchange of words or glances.

They waited.

Summer, Martha remembered, and the sky was cloudy without thunderheads, threatening only to blow over without rain. A mockingbird made a sound like a dry wooden wheel squeaking. Martha stood, not even waving away the gnats.

Old Randall made no move.

At first they walked calmly, then more rapidly toward the fallen man. The dry grass shushed under their bare feet as they ran.

No one ever found the bones of old Randall. God moved Brother Guy to leave twenty children without food (only two of whom had the memory of fat sizzling on the fire and a full stomach) just in case they'd forgotten that they lived in His mercy.

They swung their pigeons in tandem as they wandered the city. Switzer talked about things that she couldn't really understand. Like trying to imagine the shape of the city if she'd only seen the ruins they'd passed through, she couldn't follow his words.

"We're driven to excesses," he said. "If we have food, we eat it until it's gone. If there's more than we can eat at once, we eat until we're sick, and go back for the rest before we're hungry. If we have enough fuel, we burn it until we're hot, even if the next day we have to be cold again. People are stupid and greedy when they're hungry and cold. If the government hadn't deserted us, they would try to fix things. But everyone with money and power moved to the equator. We've been deserted. After the Tropical War, all the people who could help moved away from the situation, and now they've forgotten."

"What about the governor?" Martha asked, trying to take part.

"Oh, he's greedy, too," Switzer said with disgust.

As they crawled through empty structures, overturned heaps of trash, opened cans and boxes and wrecked cars, he talked about scientific farming in cold weather, building places to live in space, and the lack of research in fission, solar power, and other energy sources.

"They were working on all those things before the weather changed. But it was all so half-hearted because they never really believed we would need it. By the time we did, everything was too ruined to make any constructive moves. My parents owned a company that designed solar homes."



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Martha wondered if his parents lived at the house, and what "solar homes" were, but didn't ask.

He was quiet as they headed back. The kind of quiet that sounded like he was trying to think of something to say. Finally, he asked, "Can I sleep with you tonight?"

"I guess so," Martha said. "But . . ."

"I'll fix the bell. Don't like it anyway."

The longer she was with him, the more peculiar he seemed, but she thought it would be nice to have someone to play with anyway.

Jenny greeted them at the door when they arrived just after dark. She stared at Switzer a long time, then rifled through their bag and nodded at the pigeons with approval.

"Martha got most of them," he said.

"Maybe she'll earn her keep then," Jenny said.

It hadn't been such a good day for the others. For dinner they each ate a few spoonsful of pigeon and potato in a paste of water, flour, and lard. Martha ate the sparse amount, hoping there would be seconds. There were none. She scarcely spoke a word, but conversation was limited to general comments about the events of the day or the assignment of chores. Martha noticed for the first time that even though her Aunt Jenny said little, most of the conversation was addressed to her, or in her direction, or with an eye for her approval or amusement. It had been exactly the same with Brother Guy at the camp.

Jenny was the head of the house, no doubt.

Martha didn't like her. Simply, without wondering why, she didn't like Jenny's silent appraisal of all that occurred around her. She didn't like the way she held her fork, or tilted her head and half-closed her eyes when someone asked her a direct question. Even the clothes she wore were crisp and characterless. Jenny was neither relaxed nor tense, neither cheerful nor irritable. She was obscure and remote. Martha didn't think of people in intimate enough ways to actually realize it was this obscurity that bothered her, she only felt that Jenny didn't care for her. In return she didn't like Jenny, and that was that.

Switzer was as quiet as herself through the meal. Guessing his anticipation for the night, she smiled a few times.

Jenny gave her choices for evening entertainment; she could read in one of the upstairs bedrooms until it was time for the children to go to sleep, or play cards in the living room, or just chat in the kitchen and dining room. Martha heard mention of a fiddle, but heard no music that evening.



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She wanted to play cards when she heard there would be a game. Not since she'd lived with her father had she played. Switzer mumbled something about reading and left the room with a disappointed look on his face.

"Here you go, little Martha," said one of the granddads, indicating a chair for her. Martha would've felt friendly to him, but she saw his quick glance at her aunt and felt the politics of the situation. She sat down. One of the other players was Darren, the man who'd spoken against her the night before.

They played rummy for a few rounds without much talk. Martha did all right, but it was obvious that the others played just about every night. She got bored with losing and stood.

"Where are you going?" one woman asked, alarmed. She'd been sitting in a nearby chair the whole time, chatting with the players while she sewed rags together.

Martha just stared at her.

"Where are you going?" the woman repeated in a higher voice.

"I don't know."

"You just sit back down then," Darren said.

"Honey, go get Jenny," the woman said.

They all stared at Martha. Martha stared back. At first, she meant to hold Darren's gaze without a flinch, knowing that a straight look was the best way to deal with anger. But something wavered within her and she began to study his throat, his meaty forearm and measured the breadth of his shoulders.

"Jenny!" he shouted. "Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked Martha, eyes narrowed.

Martha turned away from him. When Jenny came into the room, each oriented toward her. "What's going on here?"

"Are you going to let her wander around loose?"

Jenny sighed. "Come with me." She took Martha into the dining room and guided her to a straight-backed chair. "Sit here and just keep away from Patricia and Darren." And then she was gone again.

Martha watched children play with jacks and miniature houses built from welded tin cans. They begged attention from adults and older children. The elderly women sat together, as if they could only find interest in each other, occasionally patting a child. The room smelled of damp diapers and old, flaking skin. The women chattered about the people they used to know.

Martha sighed and wiggled in her chair.

"So you're Harry's?" one of the grannies said, noticing Martha's presence.



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Martha nodded.

"You look a lot like him, yes," she said. "But last time I saw him, he was so changed, you know. It was the first time in . . ." She calculated, ". . . eighteen years."

Martha had not dared speak about her daddy. But she found her restlessness disappearing as she leaned toward the granny. "When did you see him?"

"Oh, it was just last summer. I remember because I was thinking the weather wouldn't be too bad for him at first."

"Weather?"

"At that prison. In Dakota." She lowered her voice and peered around the room as if she were about to tell Martha every confidence she'd stored up for several years. "I think myself that people eatin' people ain't so bad—maybe killin' 'em is. We tried to tell 'em years ago that there were too many people, and that things were going to go bad one way or another. They thought we were just anti-Establishment, you know? Well, we didn't know that the weather—"

"Then he's not dead?"

"Last I heard he was alive. I used to know him a long time ago. I was a friend of Jenny and Harry's father a long time ago." The granny smiled.

"Jenny told me he was dead," Martha said slowly. It was easy for her to believe it had been a lie.

"Oh, I don't think so," the granny said helpfully. "She probably didn't want you running off after him. He talked about you a lot."

"Sharon," said the other old woman.

The granny continued in a cheerful way. "Jenny just knows that you can't go see him. These days family doesn't count for much. It never used to, I thought, but it's even worse now. Why half the folks that live here don't know if their relatives are dead or alive, and most of 'em probably don't care. Just another mouth, another bed. They'd take a stranger sooner, if he was useful. When I was young, we all believed in love and peace and helping each other. . . ."

"Sharon," said the other again, placing her bony hands on the sagging flesh of her companion's arm. "These people here, they're like rats. You can't turn your back on any of 'em, and they're still better than some. Remember that."

"Watch me, Sharon and Candy!" shouted one of the children. "Watch me!"

Just as the conversation had involved her, it left her again. Martha began to shiver. She turned her head slowly, gazing in-



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tently, as if to see through the walls of the house the bell that imprisoned her.

She stirred, hearing a muffled tap at her door. It was an inadvertent sound, followed by more movement brushing against her door. Then the bolt-lock slid.

"It's me." Switzer's voice.

Martha sat up and drew her knees to her chest. He crawled onto the mattress and pulled the door closed quietly. "Waring may have heard me. I couldn't tell if he woke up." He spoke softly and put his fingers on her thigh. "I brought something."

She couldn't see him in the darkness, but sensed that he reached within his shirt. She felt something smooth and hard on her arm. "What is it?"

"An apple. We can share it. I could only get one this time."

She took a couple of eager bites and realized that she had eaten her half already. Reluctantly, she passed it over. Her mouth felt rough and dry from its tartness.

"What did you do to the bell?" she asked.

"I tied the clapper with cloth." He searched for her hand with his. Finding it, he put the apple core in her palm. Martha ate it. He rubbed small circles on her thigh.

She pulled her shirt off over her head, elbows knocking against the boxes around her. "Hey, Switzer."

"What?" It sounded as though he were undressing, too.

"Did you know that my daddy was sent to Dakota?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He was silent.

"Is he dead or not?"

"I don't know," he said. "The first I heard of it was what Jenny said to you last night. I was going to find out for you. We can't ask Jenny, of course. She knows that you'll try to leave."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked. Her voice raised.

"Shh." He was quiet for a moment. "I wanted to wait until I knew for sure, so you wouldn't get your hopes up. And then I thought we could save up some supplies and . . . Well, I want to go with you."

"With me! To Dakota? Why?"

"Because I want to."

"Yeah, sure," she said, "*everybody* wants to go to Dakota."

"You'll see. You remember that I got you an apple? I can do even better than that. We can have everything we need in just



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a few days, or a week." He paused. "I knew you would want to go. I really was going to tell you."

She believed him. He had an eager sound in his voice. He'd told her before that he'd done a bit of traveling; that would make him a good companion for the road. He gradually moved closer to her and she adjusted with his moves until they were parallel shapes on the shallow mattress.

She could figure the route to Dakota; she'd heard talk about it all her life. It was wretched, even though spring was coming on. Glassy snow covered even the most traveled areas. Open stretches of land made it difficult to travel without goods to exchange for safe passage from those who made their living off highway traffic.

I will need food, she thought, feeling Switzer's skin touch hers. He was warm.

*She saw him by her side as they trudged through the snow, talking of times when technology would take care of misery, and everyone would have food and shelter. He was serene and calm, looking forward to things she couldn't see. And vulnerable because she had him in the white light of snow and sun at a casual moment. She drew out of her coat the axe he had lent to her.*

She dug her fingertips into his shoulders. He was not lean. Everywhere he touched her, she blazed. Never before had she been so warm that sweat was like a mist hovering over her pores. Their breathing, kisses, and suppressed voices became a secret between them.

*She sliced his carotid easily with the axe and hardened herself against the look of betrayal that became his death mask. Her fingers clamped the wound as he fell, so that the blood flowed into the tissues rather than spilling wastefully on the ground.*

Never before had her body been so confusing to her. A feeling overcame her that would have been soothing had it not been so urgent, had it not been pushing her to something further. . . .

*When the pulsing stopped completely, she dragged him by his coat collar off the road under a clump of shrubs where she quickly gathered stones and built a fire. She heated the axe in the flames until it sizzled when tested in the snow. With one stroke, it would cauterize the flesh it hacked through. First—the arms, cut through until she could disengage the ball and socket. Then, the knee joints, then the thigh from the hip. . . .*

Her breathing spurted from her uncontrolled. Switzer made a sound that was like weeping, but she felt his face against hers and it was dry.

"Martha," he said softly. He didn't speak to reproach her, to



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call her attention, or to order her. She hadn't heard her name said that way for a long time, and only by one other person.

As she dozed, she thought of her father.

She woke, but with the feeling that she'd been coming awake for a long time.

The night was not hers; it belonged to the people whose sleeping presences oppressed her. Something obliged her to remain in the position dreams had shaped for her until the sound of someone muttering in their sleep freed her from the silence.

With stealth natural to her, she disentangled Switzer's fingers from her hair, dressed, and carefully opened the door.

The bell made a muffled clunk.

She stood for a moment, listening. No one moved. She made her way to the entry way and found Switzer's coat. In the pocket, the sling; in the lining, the axe.

She was hungry. She held the axe and stood in the darkness.

"People are stupid and greedy when they're hungry," Switzer had said earlier. She thought of the way he'd said her name, and she knew what hunger would drive her to. He was something warm in her life, but she would not consume it to extinction.

Quietly, she unlatched the door and left, wearing his coat. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (From page 55)

## SECOND SOLUTION TO RUN, ROBOT, RUN!

It is easy to see that Farfel would again win the race, and you don't need to know the distance or the dogs' running speeds to prove it. Because Farfel began the race as far behind the finish line as he was ahead when the first race ended, the two dogs will be side by side when Farfel has gone a distance equal to the distance between start and finish lines. In this case, the dogs will be together when they are 10 yards from the finish. Since Farfel is the faster, Farfel will outrun Pasta for the remaining 10 yards.

Now for a confusing third problem. It may startle some readers by revealing how poorly they comprehend the concept of average speed.

Suppose Farfel trots once around the reservoir at a constant speed of 10 mph. Then his speed is raised to 15 mph and he trots around a second time. What is Farfel's average speed for the two circuits? Don't be too hasty in answering before you turn to page 103.

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# THE TICKING CLOCK

by Al Sarrantonio

art: John Pierard

In addition to being assistant Science Fiction and Science editor at Doubleday Books, the author has appeared in nearly every major magazine in the SF field. He is currently working on his second horror/fantasy novel, *The Worms*.

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On a cold Friday in November, on the day when a boy named Jacob was found unconscious in the street, the Ticking Clock made its appearance, as prophesied. It did so in majestic fashion. Resembling in some ways a dirigible (indeed, the Ticking Clock was nearly dirigible-sized) it glided into view between two huge steel buildings at a time when most pedestrians were making their way home from work. Its appearance was commanding, and those who witnessed its advent had the feeling that huge machineries had been set in motion.

The Ticking Clock had the form of a gigantic pocket timepiece, but without the gold chain or winding mechanism usually associated with such watches. The movement of its two-story-high hands was plainly visible behind the Clock's lucid crystal face. Its case was of gold, its face of white, striated marble, its hands of black obsidian. Gold filigree work accented its case, and etchings of rabbits and birds adorned its perimeter. The Clock had the sharpness of a dream object.

Its arrival had a galvanic effect on the City. It slid up one street and down another, at a constant height, the soft whirr of its inner workings plainly audible even above its steady ticking. It made its slow, stately way through every boulevard of the City, coming to rest, after three days, in the largest and most traversed of the City's squares, perching a few scant feet from the upraised hand of the statue depicting the City's Founder.

Though the Ticking Clock's coming had been foretold, little had been said about it other than that it would make itself known. Thus, debate over its origins and purpose immediately began and continued in earnest. Everyone in the City claimed to have seen the Ticking Clock at least once on its three-day passage; there were those who went out of their way to see it again and again after it came to rest.

There were those who saw its coming as a religious event, citing the prophecy as the prime evidence for this view. Others discounted this by pointing out that references to the coming of the Ticking Clock had been found in secular as well as religious tracts. Some designated the Clock as a purely physical phenomenon, like a comet or other astronomical anomaly. A third group doubted its existence entirely, proposing that it was merely the product of mass-hypnosis. "We are doomed," these individuals seemed to be saying, "therefore we have invented this Clock to save us from ourselves." All three groups agreed that the Ticking Clock kept excellent time.

By the middle of December the novelty of the Ticking Clock



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had worn off, and no one in the City went out of his way any longer to behold it. It seemed as if the Clock had, in essence, become part of the Founder's statue and of the surrounding square. Inhabitants continued to pause to check the timing of their own watches against it, but barely a pedestrian stopped to try to decipher the scrollwork on its casing or to marvel at the starkly beautiful sharpness of its construction. Even the watchmakers of the City had begun to lose interest as once again business became the prime employer of their time.

At the end of December it snowed heavily in the City, and for two days no one even glanced at the Clock (which acquired a soft, white mantle of precipitation) as the City dug itself out of the droppings of the storm.

A week later a passerby noticed that the Clock had stopped.

Immediately, interest in the Ticking Clock was rekindled. Once again the phenomenon began to sell newspapers, and before long a crowd had gathered in the square, pressing in at the foot of the statue for a glance up at the now-silent mechanism. The snow was gone, save for a thin rivulet of fast-melting frost that dripped down the center of the Clock's crystal to drop silently upon the spectators below, who wanted to be among those few who could claim later, over bar drinks or steaming dinners, that they had participated intimately in the affair.

Debate began in earnest now. Since the Clock had obviously wound down, the consensus was that there were only two courses of action. Either some way must be found to fix or rewind the Clock (if that was all that was required); or, if these methods failed, the Clock should somehow be towed off and taken to either a museum or a rubbish heap. Most public officials favored the immediate implementation of this second suggestion, fearing that the Clock's continued exposure in its broken condition would reflect badly on the City's image.

There was some outcry when this decision was adopted, but the general weight of apathy that always descends on the public after a choice has been lifted from their shoulders cleared the way for the removal of the Clock.

It was determined that helicopters were too dangerous to use, so at first a ground towage was attempted. A cable would be somehow adhered to the Clock; the other end would be connected to a strong truck. In theory the Clock could then be pulled through the streets of the City (the route adopted coincidentally retraced a good portion of the Clock's original path) to its new domicile, an empty airship hangar at the bank of the river. Then, after



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examination, it would be either fixed or put in permanent residence in one of three competing museums. Preparations for the heated auction by the three establishments were already well under way.

However, the Clock could not be moved this way. First, the attachment of the cable to the timepiece was found to be nearly impossible: there were no protuberances on the mechanism, and the officials in charge were loath to try to bore a hole in the casing. This problem was finally solved when a webbing of soft but extremely powerful cables was draped around the entire surface area of the clock. Second , the Clock would not budge from its position above the upstretched arm of the Founder's statue. Impatient, the movers surreptitiously applied an inordinate amount of pressure to the timepiece, but it was as if it had been bolted to the very atmosphere.

After repeated attempts by ground and by air (an ancient airship was employed but to no avail—although the sight of the marvelous dirigible moored to the bedrock-like timepiece was a memorable one for those who beheld it), the Clock was finally, and cleverly, declared part of the statue over which it hovered, and left to its own devices. Interest in it again waned.

By April the Ticking Clock was completely ignored. It now shared the fate of most monuments. Birds began to roost upon it and mar its face with their droppings; a bit of tarnish began to fog its casing. Its obsidian hands remained fixed at the time of five minutes before the hour of eleven.

It was also in April, when the warmth of the new season had stirred its way into every corner of the City, that Jacob awoke in the hospital. Besides his name he knew nothing about himself, and no one had come to claim him. He was a singular boy, with thinning blond hair and overlarge eyes in his thin ascetic face. But he knew how to smile, and his smile saved him.

The hospital room's window, tucked as it was in the farthest corner of the building and on its topmost floor, offered a partially impeded view of the lower half of the City. Jacob rushed to the window to see the outside world the first day he was allowed from his bed, and it was in this way that he discovered the Ticking Clock.

Looking to his right, and at a distance of about one mile, he could see the square where the Clock was moored. Jacob thought it looked splendid and majestic, a thick golden wafer dominating all that surrounded it. He could just make out a quarter-moon sliver of its crystal and the solemn black hands behind it.



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"Why don't its hands move?" he asked the nurse who had come in to change his linen. He pointed with his thin, reedy finger, and the scales of sleep that had hung behind his eyes began to fall away.

"It's broken, don't bother about it" was her answer.

Jacob began to search out information on the Clock then, but he discovered there was little interest, let alone passion, inspired by it.

But he had passion enough himself. He collected all information available on the Clock. He obtained a pair of binoculars and sat for hours staring at the Clock and pretending he was as close to it as he appeared to be. He drew detailed maps of that part of the gold case he could see, lingering over each detail. There were whole scenes etched there: a river that seemed to run around the perimeter of the outside of the casing, and on its banks a score of bizarre animals. There were markings like tiny craters on the moon. There were arrows and exotic pathways that led around to areas Jacob could not see. He longed desperately to explore them all.

He resolved that he would repair the Ticking Clock.

Jacob was endowed with a gift for fixing mechanical things, and he sought to exploit this talent by learning the watchmaker's craft.

On the first day of May he left the hospital, and, armed with his newly acquired tools, he made his way to the Ticking Clock.

He had the square to himself. In mid-morning of mid-week, there were few passersby in this area. He began to climb the statue of the Founder. With ropes and tiny brass pulleys, he quickly brought himself to the shoulders of the statue. Above him, breathtaking and awesome, was the Clock.

As Jacob made his way up the arm of the Founder, he realized that a crowd had formed at the base of the statue. Somewhere a whistle had blown, and it was lunchtime. He had been spied, and the news of his actions had spread.

The Ticking Clock had become interesting again.

Jacob turned back to his work. He made his way up to the point of the upraised finger of the statue. He tested its strength; it looked as though it would hold. Down and around the upraised finger, as if it were a paper-spike in a business office, Jacob slipped a platform he had constructed of strong metal, and upon this platform he carefully raised himself.

Standing acrobatically, one arm out for balance, he reached up and touched the Clock. A thrill went through him. For months



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he had dreamed of this moment, and here it was. The cool metal of the gold casing felt like a caress to him.

Below him, the crowd watched silently.

Jacob rigged his mesh net, similar to the one used by the City in the ill-fated attempt to move the Clock, and flung it up and over the instrument. Luckily, and to Jacob's delight, it took hold with the first try.

Jacob now walked on the surface of the Clock.

There was polite applause from those below. Jacob ignored them. He began to search the surface of the Clock, starting at the rim where the glass crystal met the case, looking for either a winding mechanism or some entry into the Clock. Finding none, he methodically made his way around the case, working toward the center of the back in ever-tightening circles. He found that he was following some sort of pathway that he had not been able to discern in his binocular mappings.

When he reached the exact center of the back, he discovered a door. It opened easily at Jacob's prodding. It led into the interior of the Clock.

Holding his breath, Jacob entered.

An eerie light filtered in through the doorway behind him and illuminated the inner workings. Jacob found himself on a platform supporting two gold metalwork stairways, one leading upward to the right, the other upward to the left. He chose the one to the left. A giant, static flywheel came into view as he lit his torch, making his way slowly, reverently up the steps. Thousands of different-sized gears surrounded him, running up and around past his vision. He climbed a little farther and found himself face to face with a pendulum; a ratchet wheel loomed off to the right. Making a lasso, Jacob swung his way past it, landing on a tiny walkway that curved up and around.

Following it, Jacob came face to face with a gold windup key.

He touched it, and, with tears in his eyes, he began to wind it.

A tentative clicking sound built into a grand and throaty *tick-tick, tick-tock* that filled Jacob with an inner peace. The Ticking Clock began to work once more.

Behind and above him, a discordant echo sounded.

A footstep.

Suddenly frightened, Jacob untangled his lasso and prepared to swing back to the platform and down and out of the Ticking Clock.

"*Wait.*"

The voice from above was as smooth as the gears around him.



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Jacob turned and looked up.

Feet appeared between two spinning gears, followed by a body that moved as nimbly as a monkey's. There were no ropes; the figure had the fluid motions of one who knew the workings of the Clock intimately.

Jacob's lantern fluttered out as the figure dropped, and he relit it to find, standing before him, what he took to be a wild man. A wrinkled face, pale as Jacob's from lack of sun, nestled above a lengthy salt-and-pepper beard. The beard reached almost to the man's knees. His squinting eyes were lit with either madness or pleasure.

"Ah."

"Who are you?" said Jacob fearfully. He backed to the edge of the tiny platform.

"I say 'ah' again, boy."

The man took a step closer, his ankle-length robe shifting with a hiss.

"Who are you?"

"Don't you know the prophecy, boy?" He pointed downward. "Don't they all know it, the poor fools?"

"It was prophesied that the Ticking Clock would return when it did," Jacob replied.

"It always does."

Jacob gasped.

"It always returns. And the prophecy is always the same. That's the beauty of it. And the tragedy of it."

"But who *are* you?"

"I'm tired, boy. Time for me to rest."

With a sudden start the bearded man pulled himself gracefully past Jacob, dangling for a moment over the drop as he held to a slender gearshaft before bringing himself to rest on the far walkway. Jacob, using his lasso, sought to catch up.

"Wait!"

The old man continued, passing the dizzily swinging pendulum, dropping down and around the box of a thousand gears, and descending the golden stairway to the left. Jacob flew down the steps to the right, meeting the man head-on at the lower platform leading to the doorway to the outside world.

"*I said wait!*"

The man was halfway out, his hand already on Jacob's mesh net to ease himself down and away from the Ticking Clock. He half-turned to Jacob, made room in the doorway for light to enter.

"Look below," he said calmly.



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Outside, in the grand square of the City, a change had come over the populace.

Some had merely fallen over where they stood; others, in protest, had struck at their own bodies or those of their companions, seeking to make them continue to run. Some pedestrians had burst open, revealing fine springs and gears from neck and stomach cavities. A few citizens were still in the act of winding down, tracing aimless circles, their mouths moving soundlessly.

Jacob looked up at the old man, who for a moment returned his tortured gaze. Jacob saw now that this man had Jacob's own eyes, his own face.

"Are we the only real ones?" Jacob whispered.

"Aye," the man said kindly. "Don't ask me how it happened, Jacob. But when it did happen, there was nothing but a watchmaker left. You'll clone the one to follow you when it's time, leave him here to be found and for the germ of wonder about this City, his City, to infect him. That's biology, it's easy. The rest is easy, too. You have the talent. Make them well, boy, as we all do. They'll be yours alone. And make sure they know the prophecy, that it's in their metal bones and their gearbox minds. And most important, make them believe in themselves. They'll be happy." He sighed. "You'll be content."

He pulled himself with effort out of the door and began to make his way down the gold casing of the Ticking Clock.

"These are mine, boy," he called up after him. "Time for me to sleep with them."

Jacob watched as the man made his way down the arm of the statue of the Founder (a statue that looked remarkably like himself, as Jacob now saw) and pushed his way slowly through the square, stopping now and then to gently ease a mechanical body, deep in the last quiet throes of life, to the ground.

After a while he was lost to sight.

There was a subtle shift deep within the Ticking Clock.

Jacob looked down to see that it had moved from the tip of the Founder's finger and was gliding slowly over the square and toward the river, past the point where it had first appeared in the City.

No one looked up to see it pass.

Jacob felt the warmth of the Ticking Clock around him, and felt a warmth in his hands and in his tools.

The river passed, a gurgling blue, below.

A deep *tocking* sound, either mournful or ineluctable, sounded from the distance.



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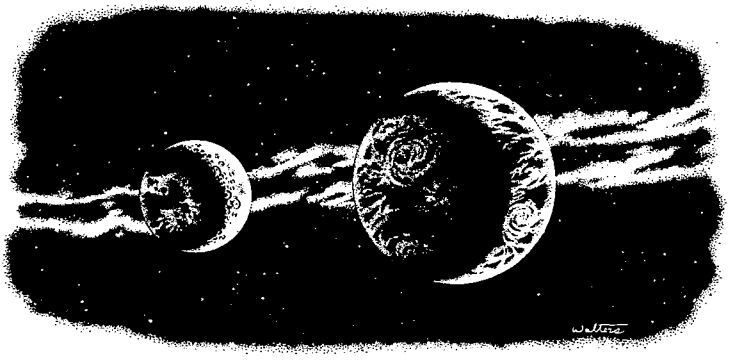
The sound became louder.

And there, at the horizon of the world, rearing up huge and slow as the morning sun, all but one of the million facets of its crystal lenses where Jacob's own mechanism would nestle glinting, waited the real Ticking Clock. ●



MARTIN GARDNER (From page 94)

## THIRD SOLUTION TO RUN, ROBOT, RUN!

The average speed for the two trips is *not* 12½ mph as most people guess. Again, let $x$ be the distance around the reservoir. At 10 mph it takes Farfel $x/10$ hours to make one circuit. The two circuits take $x/10 + x/15$ hours, which reduces to $x/6$ hours. Farfel, therefore, runs $2x$ miles in $x/6$ hours. Speed equals distance divided by time, and time equals distance divided by speed. Therefore the average speed for Farfel, for the two circuits, is $2x$ divided by $x/6$, which comes to $12x/x$. The $x$'s cancel, giving an answer of 12 mph.

One final question—an old chestnut that still amazes those who haven't heard it before. If Farfel completes one trip at 10 mph, how fast must he travel on a second trip to raise his average speed for the two trips to 20 mph? See the solution on page 131.



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# THE FINAL VOICE

## by Rick Johnson

art: Alfred Ramirez

The author, now 23, began reading science fiction at the relatively late age of 18, and began writing it at 19. He attended the 1981 Clarion Workshop, and wrote this story—his first sale—some five months later.

*There are those who would tell the story of Jered Anson wrong. They would scoff at him, claiming that his actions went against every personality trait he had ever shown, and thus were the workings of a madman. They would ignore what he did and why he did it, because it does not suit their purposes to remember his reasons.*

*Then there are those who tell the story of Jered Anson quickly as they pass each other in hallways. They speak it reverently to their children and pass scribbled snatches of it to people who do not know it. These are the people who will never forget him, nor should they; for mankind will always need its heroes, especially in troubled times like these. . . .*

Jered Anson was a scavenger. He plied his lonely trade among the widely scattered stars, wandering hopefully around dead and deserted planets and human installations, searching for souvenirs or salvageable parts. It was a life that suited him, for he had never gotten on well with others. In bazaars and markets he felt uncomfortable, pressed upon by the multitude of bodies, his senses hammered by the myriad sounds, smells, and sights of humans and their business. He had long ago discovered that this was not for him. Give him the dark barrenness of space, the feel of his small ship moving beneath him, the prospect of finding un-



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dreamed-of wealth somewhere in the next system: these were the things he sought. What did it matter if more often than not his cargo turned out to be worthless? It was the freedom that mattered, not the means by which he kept it. His needs were simple, and he did not require much profit to live as he wished. He was a man content: living on his own terms on the fringes of humanity. He did not desire pity.

His path once took him near the Earth, and from such a simple sentence, recorded in the memories of those who came after, does his legend grow. His mission was routine: he had been commissioned to find some artifacts in the Sol asteroid belt much desired by a wealthy collector on the third planet of Procyon. Anson did not know the collector's name, nor did he wish to. He understood the importance the collector placed on anonymity. Earth had long before been placed under interdict by the ruling councils of the outer planets. None of the Terran colony worlds had any desire to involve themselves in the bloody conflict raging across their old homeland. No ships went near Earth anymore, for fear of confiscation and imprisonment, so the collector had been forced to turn to someone like Anson to get his desired trinkets.

Anson knew the penalties that awaited him should he be caught but he regarded them with the same nonchalance as he did the yearly taxes on himself and his vessel. It was a risk, but he had faced worse and escaped. Civil punishment means little to the man who does not care about the law.

His trip to Sol system was uneventful and he found what he had been sent for. While his robodroids filled his hold with the souvenirs, he began plotting his course to the place where he was to deposit his payload and await remuneration.

The patrol vessel appeared so suddenly beside his ship that he was momentarily startled. He moved to jettison his cargo but was stayed when the patrol ship called to him and he heard its words coming from his radio.

"You can hold on to your precious junk, Anson. We don't intend to arrest you."

Anson paused before replying. It obviously would do no good to lie: he had been caught red-handed. If they did not want to arrest him then they would have their reasons. He decided to wait and hear what they were.

"You still there, Anson?"

"I'm here."

"I have a message for you from the High Commission. Stand by for transmission."



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Now Anson was wary. A personal message from the governing body of the Confederation? It made no sense, and because of that he began to worry. He started to sweat and stepped up the cooling unit of his ship.

"From the High Commission Bureau of Public Safety to Cit. Jered Anson, captain of salvage vessel *Kyrie*. It has come to our attention that you have willfully violated the Terran interdict without proper authorization. This act carries with it penalties which must be known to you. This patrol vessel has been instructed to place you under tow and take you to a place of detention, there to await further action, unless you consent to an act of reparation which we now offer you. Before we continue, do you wish to terminate this transmission and accept your punishment as pursuant to Confederation law?"

Anson was more than willing to hear their offer. "No, please, I'm very interested. Go on."

"For the past three weeks, a distress beacon has been transmitting from somewhere on Earth. We now have the coordinates. Unfortunately it is too late for us to do anything. Our last reports indicate that advanced weaponry was deployed on Earth and that the population of the planet has been eliminated. It is our offer that you go to Earth and silence this beacon. In return we will permit you to go free, provided you leave your cargo behind. Do you agree to these terms?"

Anson did not like it. Why not just send one of the patrol ships down to deactivate this beacon? Why use him, a civilian?

He did not care about Earth. Like all citizens of the Confederation, a goodly portion of his yearly taxes went to support the peoples of Terra. The burden was shared and disliked by all and he knew that secretly, no matter what might be said otherwise, the High Commission must be glad that its responsibility to the home world was over.

But the politics involved were not his concern. Here was an offer of freedom and he would be foolish not to take advantage of it.

"I accept. Please feed the coordinates into my ship's computer so I can find the beacon." The information was given to him and he locked it into his guidance controls.

"We will expect no further communication from you until you have finished your task," Anson heard. "We will know when the beacon has been extinguished and at that moment your crime will be pardoned." Then his radio erupted in sparks as the patrol ship overloaded its circuits and burnt out his receiver.



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Anson was furious. What kind of fool did they take him for? He had no intention of broadcasting his assignment to any other vessels in the area. He had maintained radio silence during his month-long trip to the asteroids. He certainly wasn't one to boast of his whereabouts.

The patrol ship vanished into subspace and Anson was left to himself. He programmed his ship for the journey to Earth and settled back to ponder his mission.

It was obvious the High Commission did not want to become officially involved in this matter. That was acceptable; he knew that government did not always operate in full view of its citizenry. But why him? Proximity? There might be other salvage ships running through the Sol system that he did not know about. If there were then he must have been chosen for some special reason. Was he expendable? Did they foresee danger on Earth and want to send someone who would not be missed? Anson examined this last possibility with cold detachment. He knew of no one who could disappear with fewer ripples than himself. He could find no answer based on what he knew so he put the problem from his mind and watched as he approached the Earth.

Songs have been written about this moment, when Jered Anson returned to his homeland. It is known that somewhere inside himself he felt a strange ache at the sight of that blue-green world racing to meet him like a mother reaching out to gather in a long-lost son. Much later, when he recorded his story for posterity, he spoke long of that moment, and the ease his heart felt when he landed on Manhome and his feet first trod the soil of his race's birthplace.

Around him lay the ruins of a people who forsook themselves. He blanched at the sight of cracked and toppled buildings, groundscoots smashed into twisted rubble, and bodies, fallen in the embrace of a grim lover.

His computer informed him that radiation levels were low enough to permit him to move unprotected about the city. It advised injections to combat the illnesses he might contract from the decaying corpses. It scanned the nearby area at his order and reported that some humans still lived and told him in what general direction they could be found.

Anson was not alarmed by this discrepency with the High Commission's statement. A few people might easily evade a simple scanning.

Armed with a small welding laser he set out, cautiously at first, then, after going some distance without sighting any other people,



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more confidently. He guessed that the beacon would be located in the city's spaceport so he followed the directing roadsigns toward that destination.

The stench was overpowering and more than once he stopped and vomited after coming upon a grisly scene of destruction. He made his way slowly through the streets and was amazed at the extent of the devastation he saw. Everywhere were bodies. Some must have died while running, and others perished in their groundscoots, futilely trying to escape the unfettered death that had run rampant in those last hours. Sometimes Anson saw whole families fleeing in their groundscoots, and once he was touched by the sight of a mother who had vainly thrown herself across her husband and son in a forlorn attempt to ward off the end that sought them.

Finally he reached the spaceport. He had to push aside the body of a man who had died while trying to claw his way through the fence to get inside the launch area. Anson wondered if the man had thought he could steal a ship and escape. "At least you died trying," he said softly. He lay the man gently on the ground and went inside.

Finding the communications building took a little time and night was falling when he at last located it. Anson decided to go in and try to find the beacon, turn it off, then stay in the building for the night. The sky was darkening and it looked like rain.

He stepped in and was immediately on guard. The lobby was clean and smelled sweet compared to the wretched air outside. Couches and cabinets had been stacked around the stairway leading up to the broadcasting rooms. Anson noticed wires strung with small cans stretched across the length of the floor. He examined some of the cans and found bits of fresh food still in some of them.

"So this is where everyone's hiding," he muttered. He raised his welding laser and walked carefully over to the stairs.

The snap of a gunbolt froze him solid. "Stand still, mister, and turn around. And drop that gun before you do anything."

Anson let the laser fall and slowly pivoted. A girl of about thirteen had her rifle aimed directly at his heart. Her face and clothes were dirty and her thick head of short brown hair was caked with blood on the right side. Her hands trembled slightly but her gaze never wavered. "I found another one, Daddy!" she cried.

A tall, gaunt man with eyes that shone with fresh tears moved out from among the shadows that surrounded the stairs. He looked



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Anson over silently then took the rifle from his daughter. "I'll handle this, Karen. You better go up to your brother now. Bobby wants to see you before—" Her father's voice faltered and his eyes welled up again. He wiped the tears angrily and kept watching Anson while Karen ran upstairs, calling her brother's name.

"What the hell do you want here?" the man demanded. "You look well-fed enough. You hunting for better digs? Well, you can turn around and beat it, friend. This family's not leaving here while any of us are still breathing."

Anson's fingers itched for the feel of his laser. "I don't want to take your place. I was sent down here by the High Commission to—"

"Those bastards!" the man shrieked. "Now they decide to show up? After it's all been blown to hell? What are you supposed to be, the property evaluator waiting for us all to die off so you can clean up the neighborhood and see if you can salvage anything from the mess the tenants made of it?"

Anson was stung by the venom in the man's words. "They told me that there weren't any people left. I was sent down to turn off a distress beacon."

The man's face slid into an expressionless mask. He gripped the rifle tighter and placed his finger on the trigger. "Distress beacon, hell. They know what it is. And it stays on."

Anson held up his hands in placation. "Look, I don't care what it is or isn't. They told me to come down here and turn it off or they'd take away my ship."

"The High Commission wouldn't threaten you with that unless they had a reason," the man said accusingly.

"They had a reason," Anson said. "I was in this system illegally. But that doesn't solve our problem. Why can't we just turn it off? It's too late for them to send a spaceark, isn't it? There can't be very many people left alive after the wars."

"Just a few scattered groups," the man said. "That's as much as we know. We've heard rumors of gangs living outside the city, storing up food and supplies. I expected that. That's why my family and I have built this place up like we have. No one's coming in here and turn off the beacon."

"But what good can keeping it on do?" Anson pleaded. "Whatever's happened is over now. The High Commission doesn't intend to send any rescue ships. They don't think there's any reason to."

"All the more reason why the beacon stays on." The man chuckled grimly. "So we still aren't worth anything to them, huh?" A look of pain crossed his face. "Maybe they're right after all." He



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sighted down the barrel. "But I'll be damned if I'll let them forget what they chose to ignore." He gestured with his rifle toward the door. "You better leave, friend. Night's a bad time to be out now. You might get back to your ship before the rovers come out."

Anson stared hard at him. "I won't lose my ship over this, mister. She's all I've got and no christless beacon is worth my losing her. You understand that?"

The man fired into the floor at Anson's feet. "You better get out of here," he said. "My son's going to die soon and I don't want to be wasting my time with you when he does." He drew back the bolt and loaded another cartridge. Anson spun and fled into the street.

That night he lay awake in his bunk thinking about the man he had met. What could be so important that he would barricade himself and his family in that building? Nothing could be worth getting killed for. Anson would understand it if the man was trying to protect his home or his family, but this? It seemed like the beacon was more important than anything else.

Anson could see no other course but to work his way into the building and deactivate the beacon, by force if necessary. Tomorrow he would find a weapon and case the communications building until he discovered a way to get inside undetected. He did not want to harm anyone, but he was not about to lose his livelihood over something so ridiculous.

The next morning's search for a gun proved fruitful. He found a new automatic pistol and a large supply of bullets and stocked them away in his ship. After eating he went back to the spaceport and hid near a garage that faced the communications building, hunkering down to watch for any activity in the family's home.

After crouching for almost an hour Anson saw the father walk out carrying a large bundle enclosed in a sack. A small foot protruded from one end and Anson guessed it to be the man's son. Why doesn't he leave? Anson wondered. What could possibly be worth watching your family die? Anson shook these questions from his mind and ran swiftly across the yard to the door. The father was taking his son's body around the back of the building. Anson hoped that he would bury the boy in one of the tree-lined traffic dividers. If he did Anson would have plenty of time to get upstairs to the beacon room.

He darted inside and ran to the stairway. He could hear nothing coming from upstairs so he soundlessly padded up, his eyes watching warily for any signs of anyone else.

Anson made it up the stairs and found himself in a long hallway



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that reeked of decomposing food. Breathing through his mouth, Anson hurried along until he reached the broadcast room. It was locked.

"Damn it," he muttered. His pistol could blow the door open but it would also bring the family running. What to do?

Sounds on the stairs below him sent him scurrying into the nearest room. He shut its door behind him and fell to his knees so he wouldn't be seen through the translucent window. Soft footsteps echoed in the hallway and Anson guessed that the daughter was coming. He looked around frantically for a place to hide.

The room he was in had been converted into a storeroom with large boxes of canned food and crates of ammunition stacked up to six feet high all around him. He saw some empty boxes in the far corner and ran to them, slipping on a puddle of kerosene and scrambling into one of the larger boxes, drawing himself as far back as he could. He held his pistol ready.

The daughter opened the door and looked in, her rifle sweeping the room as she listened intently for any sound. Anson knew she must have heard his fall and was investigating. "Who's in here?" she called. "You better come out now. My daddy will be back soon and he'll make you come out." She braced the butt of the rifle against her shoulder and walked into the room, closing the door firmly behind her.

Anson was trapped. Sooner or later she would find him and call for her father. Anson had been warned by that man once; he did not think he would be let off so easily this time.

The girl was approaching his box. He fought to keep his hand from trembling as he brought the pistol up and aimed it. He pleaded in his mind for her to turn around and leave.

He must have rustled for she suddenly stooped down and peered into his box. Recognition flooded her face the same moment that Anson fired.

The gunshot was the loudest, most horrible sound that Anson had ever heard. Karen was knocked over by the blast and lay sprawled on the floor. Her rifle lay across her chest.

Fighting the urge to scream, Anson stumbled out of the box and bolted out the door, flying recklessly down the hallway, heedless of possible discovery. He sped down the stairs and out the door, still clutching the pistol with all the strength of his right hand.

He ran back to his ship and fell against its hatch, panting with revulsion. Karen's face blazed before him and would not leave. Anson climbed inside and took a large dose of tranquilizer. He



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tried to force himself to sleep but drowsiness refused to come. Finally he gave up and sat upright on his bunk, holding his head in his hands. God in heaven, what had he done? He had murdered a young girl in cold blood. He shivered despite the midday heat.

Why had he done it? To avoid discovery, he told himself, but that was not good enough. He had panicked after her death and ran, leaving her body and the still-broadcasting beacon behind. Now he was sure the father would redouble his efforts to guard the communications building. Anson had murdered with nothing to show for it towards the fulfillment of his mission.

His mission. Angrily he stood up, striking at himself with tensed fists. Look what they had made him do! Because of the High Commission's order he had killed a child and—he stopped to ponder an awful realization—he might have to kill again before he could turn off the beacon and be free to go.

And for what? To placate the whim of some faceless commissioner? To stifle a nuisance that annoyed some nameless official?

Yet he knew he was trapped, and with that knowledge his shoulders sagged in despair. He would lose his ship and the life he prized above all else if he did not do what they wanted. An emptiness grew within him then, engulfing his soul with a bitter hatred of men who could blandly order him to perform such deeds.

But he saw no other way open to him, and so took up his pistol and left his ship, trying not to think of what might happen as he made his way back once again to the communications building.

He trod the stairs silently and reached the hallway. As he walked past the storeroom he found himself peeking in. The body was gone but a dark stain marked the spot where Karen had fallen. Anson shuddered and moved on.

The door to the broadcasting room was unlocked. Anson gripped the doorknob and slid inside quickly, placing one finger on the pistol's trigger as he shut the door behind him.

A scraping sound made him whirl around. The father sat across the room from him at the control panel, his rifle aimed at Anson's chest. "I've dug two graves today," he said. "I won't mind a third. Move away from the door." Anson did so, raising his hands above his shoulders. "Drop the gun." The pistol's thud caused the father to nod solemnly. "You killed her, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Because she got in your way of trying to turn this thing off." He glanced at the transmitter, humming quietly as it beamed its message out to the stars.

Anson's lips were dry as he spoke. "Look, you don't understand.



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If I don't stop that thing I can't leave here. They said they'd take away my ship and throw me in jail. Don't you see? I'd be nothing without my ship. There'd be no life for me if I lost it."

"What makes you think I wouldn't understand? You're fighting for your life; the way you want to live it. I did the same thing here on Earth, only I lost. Or I thought I did. Then I started the beacon. It was the only thing left for me to do. My family agreed; the beacon had to be kept going even if it meant our lives."

"But what good is a distress beacon now?" Anson wailed.

The father shook his head sadly. "Don't you remember? I told you it wasn't a distress signal. It's a warning: a reminder of what happened to the Earth because nobody cared enough to stop it. I don't want the memory to die like the planet. All I can hope for is that someone will hear my message and use it to stop another insanity from happening somewhere else." He sighted down the barrel. "Maybe you and I aren't so different after all." He squinted and pulled the trigger.

Anson jerked as he saw the other man move to fire. The bullet tore into his left shoulder as he hit the floor, grabbed his pistol, brought it up, and fired. His shot hit the father in the chest and the man crashed to the floor, dead.

The pain in his shoulder was a burning agony as Anson got up. He walked over to the dead man and looked down at him while thoughts assailed his mind.

A warning? Why would it bother . . . ? Suddenly it made sense.

Of course the High Commission would want the beacon turned off. Anson recalled the news of unrest he had heard on his last planetfall. Four of the colony worlds were resisting the order imposed on them by the High Commission since the demise of Terran control. Scattered revolutions and terrorist outbreaks were cropping up on several worlds and if Anson could believe the power meters, this beacon was broadcasting on subspace channels to every human world. The beacon was like a bee sting; itching and irritating as it spread its venom throughout the body. No wonder the High Commission had not wanted to get too overtly involved. And the rebels who tuned in for inspiration would not react kindly to the knowledge that the High Commission had extinguished the beacon.

Anson stood for several moments watching the transmitter. He could end it now and go his own way. Slowly he reached out a hand and turned the switch to the off position.

It was done. He could leave. As he turned to go it struck him—what guarantee did he have that the Commission would in



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fact let him go? He had been caught trespassing in forbidden space; they would be within their rights to never let him leave this system. Did he dare risk taking off from Earth, especially after what he'd done?

*Maybe you and I aren't so different after all.* Maybe we aren't at that, Anson thought. He bent down and gently closed the eyes of the dead man.

To save my ship I was willing to kill. You were willing to die to preserve your simple message of warning.

Anson sat heavily into the chair, ignoring the pain in his shoulder. It was mad, he knew. They would send others. But he had food and ammunition. He had time to better fortify the building. He could make it much more difficult, yet he might not do any good at all. And then again . . .

Anson lifted the man and laid him across his shoulders. He intended to take him outside and bury him alongside the rest of his family. But before he left the room he flipped the transmitter switch back to on.

*It is known that Jered Anson killed the first eight men sent against him before the ninth succeeded in stopping him and silencing the beacon forever.*

*The beacon has been quiet now for over fifty years, stilled by direct order of the same High Commission which now runs all our human worlds. They have their own version of Jered Anson's story, but it is not the one our children hear.*

*And his message lives on, passed from one to another like precious gems, for his death ignited the great fight we now wage.*

*He has been ridiculed as a common vagabond, unfit for the homage paid him. We believe that is the common men who make the finest heroes, and the masters will find that his message, like his legend, will forever refuse to die.* ●

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# THE ULTIMATE BIOFEEDBACK DEVICE

by J. O. Jeppson

art: Tim Kirk

Dr. Jeppson, a psychiatrist herself, takes us on another visit to a club she claims really doesn't exist....

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Ensconced in a sub-basement dining room where it would not infect the supposedly normal clientele of a small Manhattan hotel, the Psychoanalytic Alliance was well into its weekly luncheon of peculiar food and conversational strife.

"It won't do," said the Oldest Member, drumming his Freudian fingers on the table. His previous, more sulphurous remarks had excoriated the Adaptive Anchovies, then the Overcompensated Oxtail, and were now directed at certain Eclectic members of Pshrinks Anonymous who had rashly brought up the subject of various devices used in place of or in association with standard therapy.

"We are not here as mere therapists," said the Oldest Member loftily. "We are psychoanalysts tried and true, if of depressingly different faiths. I realize that in these decadent times we have had to let people into the club who are Not Classically Oriented (he glared at a female Interpersonal who had so far not said a word) but there have been ominous trends lately. Even some trained analysts are thinking about, talking about, writing about, and—heaven forfend—sometimes *using* machinery."

"I suppose you could call the couch a machine of sorts," ventured one Eclectic, "and our wristwatches . . ."

"I am talking about Machinery!" said the Oldest Member. "As I recall—and my memory is as good as ever—the luncheon conversation deteriorated when a few of you began discussing the latest research in biofeedback."

"Not a bizarre topic," said the Eclectic who had brought the subject up.

"Furthermore," said the Oldest Member, raising his voice, "as analysts *we* are *not* interested in biofeedback."

"Maybe Pshrinks should be," said the Interpersonal.

"Am I going to have trouble with you today?" asked the O.M., the villainous aspect of his bristling moustaches adulterated by their silver purity.

"Perish forbid," said the Interpersonal, staring at the cobwebs on the ceiling. Then she frowned.

"What is she frowning about?" asked a younger Freudian, one who had just finished an approved Continuing Medical Education course in biofeedback and was afraid to mention it.

"Ignore her," said the Oldest Member. "I happen to remember that she took some biofeedback courses once and was a dreadful bore for weeks."

"Maybe she's frowning about something meaningful," said a Jungian.



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"Or far out," muttered an SF addicted Pshrink.

"Nonsense," said the Oldest Member. "She's being seductive."

"Seductive?" said a Pshrink from the same Institute as the Interpersonal. "To *us?*"

"She knows perfectly well that when a topic of conversation is raised and she contrives to look perturbed, we assume she is thinking about one of those bizarre cases of hers," said the O.M.

"I wonder," said the Interpersonal to the ceiling, "if we will continue to talk about robots in the third person—as if they were not present—when they become highly intelligent."

"Is this case about robots?" asked the Oldest Member.

"Not exactly, but there's a computer in it."

"And biofeedback?" asked the young Freudian eagerly.

The Oldest Member grabbed his moustaches by their waxed tips as if to ward off temptation. "No! Don't encourage her! Do we want to know *her* reason why Pshrinks should learn about biofeedback?"

No one replied verbally but there was considerable raising of eyebrows and slight forward inclination of heads.

The Oldest Member growled.

"Don't worry," said the Interpersonal, handing him her portion of Cyclothymic Chocolate, a pudding which combined light and dark chocolate in distinctly erotic patterns. "I don't have a case."

"Good," said the Oldest Member. "I confess that I like reading fiction about robots and computers but in reality they give me the willies."

"And well they might," said the Interpersonal. "To illustrate my point, I will now tell a true story."

The Oldest Member plunged into his dessert, recklessly devouring erotic patterns as he went.

When I was in one of the colleges I attended, (said the Interpersonal) I happened to share a suite with three roommates for about half the academic year. I will talk about one girl in particular—in my day, all roommates were unfortunately of the same sex as oneself—and I will refer to her as Bi, which is not her name.

Bi was younger than the rest of us because she had accelerated rapidly through school. Besides being a semi-genius, she was also a girl who knew her own mind and used it to put down yours; and if that failed there was always the intimidation of her appearance, that of a female decathlon champ. I was moderately terrified of her and relieved when the dormitory was turned over to male veterans and we moved to separate houses. She transferred to another college



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the next year, so I lost track of her, not at all to my regret.

Many years later, to my astonishment, she surfaced in my life as the wife of one of my husband's more remote professional acquaintances. She is a computer engineer; he is a publisher. I had not yet met them, so I was curious when her husband phoned and begged me to visit his wife, who would not consult a psychiatrist but might talk things over with an old friend.

Not wishing to argue over the definition of friends, I finally agreed to go to their suburban home, near her job in a company which specializes in medical computers and sophisticated biofeedback devices.

Bi was alone, having sent her husband to the local bowling club for the evening. From his photograph he definitely resembled, even at his present age, a male decathlon champ, so I assumed that it was either a marriage made in heaven or the reason for the disguised consultation.

"It's not trouble with my husband," she announced, flexing her muscles slightly in case I was inclined to disagree with her. "It's my work. I was an electrical engineer and now I'm a top computer designer. I've been working on an experimental model that's part of our long-range program for finding a cure for cancer by beefing up biofeedback so patients will be able to monitor and destroy their own cancer cells."

"That's terrific!"

"Not yet," she said. "We'll get it eventually. I thought I had but I haven't. Is there any point in talking to you? As I distinctly remember, you were not good in physics."

"True."

"Weren't you the one who was giving the electricity lab instructor ulcers until he made you promise never to throw the master switch until he had checked the wiring of your experiment?"

"Uh huh."

"How did you ever make Phi Bete? I looked you up before I let my husband call you."

"Wouldn't it be easier if you just told me what the problem is?" I asked in approved Pshrink fashion, frequently a relief.

"Well, this experiment I've been running is having some very unusual results. I don't know whether to publish or see an extremely intelligent psychiatrist. I've compromised on you."

"Thanks. What's the experiment?"

"I've got an unusual computer interposed between two unusual devices. The first device senses the physio-anatomical basis of hu-



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man tissues, almost of single cells, perhaps of DNA molecules. I suppose you think that's impossible."

"I wouldn't know. What does the computer do?"

"Tunes into the readings as if the first device were an extension of its brain, and then goes into action, mentally speaking. It compares the readings of normal and abnormal DNA, of physiological processes, of all sorts of things which you have undoubtedly forgotten if you ever understood them in the first place; and then it sends integrated data and decisions to the second device, a complicated modification of an EEG machine plus an electro stimulator. The second device informs the patient in a non-verbal way that the lower levels of the mind can absorb and use without getting screwed up by the cerebral cortex which is always lousing up attempts at getting the body to cure itself."

"I happen to think the cortex can do a good job at managing the body if used properly," I said. "After all, think of yogic control over smooth muscles—blood vessel dilation and contraction—and imagery techniques of mobilizing white blood corpuscles to eat up germs and cancer cells."

She sniffed scornfully. "*My* machine is aimed at pinpointing abnormalities and giving such accurate feedback that the patient will be able to correct things easily. I'm just having a little trouble with it at present, and the computer is so complex now that in order to find out what's wrong I think I'll have to take it apart, and that might destroy its abilities."

"Which are?"

She did not answer at once. She tapped her large white teeth and stared at me as if wondering whether or not I should be forced to get a security clearance. "I'm not sure. When I got the computer and the two devices complex enough to do what I expected them to do, I hooked myself into the system. I was feeling pretty good about the whole thing at the time, thinking that if Watson and Crick had had my machine to decipher DNA chemistry, they wouldn't have had to sweat so much getting to their Nobel prize."

"A Nobel . . ."

"I expect one too, of course. The trouble was that I suddenly blacked out during the experiment and I think I had a dream."

"Ah," I said, feeling we had arrived at more secure ground. Dreams I know about.

"But on the other hand it probably wasn't a dream. All the images were overlapping and receding, on and on. I decided that whether or not I was dreaming, I was probably also getting some sort of



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reverberating feedback from the EEG apparatus."

"Electroencephalograms are readings of the electrical activity of the brain. They don't affect the brain."

"My machine is supposed to read out and also read in, giving feedback directly to the brain cells. Can't you grasp this simple point?"

"Not exactly, but persevere."

"I tried the machine several times on different days. Soon I began to be able to differentiate the images and concentrate on one to the exclusion of the others. The first one turned out to be somewhat amusing. I saw my grandmother."

"That's hardly an unusual dream image."

"I never actually saw that grandmother, who died when my mother was a kid. There aren't any photographs of her, and yet I saw her bodily configuration perfectly. She was naked and fairly young. I called my mother in Florida and asked if her mother had had inverted nipples."

"And she had," I said since Bi seemed to have run down.

"Probably. Isn't it funny?"

"Is it?"

"I think you need a more impressive example," said Bi who, I now remembered, had had large, everted nipples.

"When I concentrated again, I thought I saw my paternal grandmother, who's alive and within reach, but when I visited her I knew she wasn't the one. I asked her if *her* mother had a streak of bright gold in her brown pubic hair when she was young. After exploding, grandmother admitted that her older brother might know and even tell, since he was without shame, like her granddaughter. I wrote to him, grandmother translated the letter, and threw it in the fire."

"Your computer must be reading different parts of your DNA that you got from different ancestors," I said.

"I'm certain of it. Then the EEG feedback is being analyzed, reconstructed, and augmented by the computer so that I end up seeing images of the entire ancestor. I presume that I don't have to explain to a doctor why I can see paternal ancestors as well as maternal, since my DNA comes from both sperm and ova. My husband understood that finally. What he doesn't understand is why I'm spending so much time with my computer. It's possible he's a trifle upset over the fact that I've fallen in love with one of my own ancestors."

"What!"

"I thought psychoanalysts aren't supposed to look surprised."

"I'm here as an ex-roommate, remember? Which ancestor have



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you fallen for? It was basketball players when I knew you."

"Well, I pushed the images back and forth, and then back and back, or the computer did—I'm not sure any more who's doing what—and bits of DNA from all sorts of people are in my cells. Most of them are ugly and uninteresting, but one I recognized. He's not exactly handsome, but incredibly intriguing and mysteriously sexy, the sort I wouldn't have considered when I was young."

"Who?"

She smiled coyly, which caused her to resemble *Tyrannosaurus rex* pretending to be friendly while closing in. "One of my great grandfathers was supposed to be upperclass English, according to family legend. Now I'm certain that he was descended from a good family indeed, in a bastard line, which makes me related to a lot of people, including Darwin's Captain Fitzroy. . . ."

"Are you trying to tell me that you think you are descended from one of the illegitimate offspring of Charles the Second?"

"When the computer and I focused properly, that's who I saw. At first I couldn't believe it was really Charles the Second, but the likeness to the portraits is unmistakable. And don't go telling me it's wish-fulfillment or pretensions to royalty, or a secret girlhood crush on Charles Two, because I was never good at history and while I enjoyed the British TV production about the monarchy, I never had any special interest in Charles. The family legend never went that far back. But I did, and let me tell you, he's a magnificent specimen of malehood when seen nude."

"I'm sure Nellie and the others thought so," I said, observing the increasingly hectic color of her cheeks and the stubborn set to her chin. "Is this all that's bothering you?"

"You don't believe me."

"I'll believe almost anything about computers and biofeedback, so please tell me if there's anything else."

She got up and strode around the living room, kicking moodily at articles of furniture. Automatically, I tensed my leg muscles, ready to spring aside if necessary.

She was silent for so long that I got impatient. Glancing at my watch, I tried to hurry things, which is never productive unless a pshrink knows what she's doing, which I didn't. "For Hell's sake, Bi, have you been imagining things? I assume that all your ancestors you tune into via your DNA are going to be youngish because the computer would reconstruct them as they looked at the time their DNA was passed on, or before—not later. Are you spending your time with this computer imagining that Charles the Second is hav-



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ing sex—"

"I tried," she said absently. "I tried hard to get inside his head and sense what was or had been going on with his body, but all I got was pictures of the interior decor of a castle. Maybe I was looking through his eyes or maybe I was imagining. I don't know. Then I thought that I'd try further back than Charles, but it was terribly confusing because there are so many roots. Finally I got a clear image of someone's arm. Mine. Big, covered with red hair, and full of itchy bugs. It scared the hell out of me."

"The bugs?"

"No. The fact that this time I was inside the person. I *was* that person, a man; and after believing that I understood men, I realized I didn't understand *him* at all, what he was thinking or talking."

"What language?"

"How would I know? He had a brand on the back of his hand that I couldn't decipher. Like this." She drew it for me.

"Looks like a rune."

"A ruin? He may have been lousy, but he was no ruin."

"Rune as in Norse. We can postulate that if you are genuinely related to the English kings your ancestry goes back to the Normans and thus to their Viking ancestors."

She brightened up at once, and I didn't have the heart to tell her that I'd omitted the fact that the Vikings inserted their DNA into a good many—er—countries.

"You've done some good after all," said Bi magnanimously. "There's no reason for me to have trepidations about following out my ancestry. I might be able to experience being pre-human, or even trace out my evolution through the animal kingdom. You aren't one of those simplistic creationists who doesn't believe in evolution, are you?"

"Of course not," I said, reflecting that while Bi was a genius of sorts in engineering, she had been and apparently still was naïve about many other things. "Don't be surprised if you get blurrier images farther back than homo sapiens. Remember that many of the DNA molecules in any person living now have been replenished by atoms from food sources, so that what you inherited from very far back is bound to be weak as far as the computer is concerned."

"I suppose you're right," she said, obviously bored. "I think it's time I called my husband home from bowling. He'll get used to my admiration for Charles the Second. He won't let me hook him up to the computer because he says he read somewhere that no man is free who has a thousand ancestors."



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"I think your husband is smarter than we are."

"We?"

"I'd love to try the machine."

"I'll think about it," said Bi with the finality which says one hasn't got a prayer. I suddenly remembered that she had always been fussy about her possessions being used by anyone else, and I was annoyed. I happen to be a full quarter English, so if anyone is likely to be descended from Charles the Second . . . but I digress.

("You certainly do," said the Oldest Member, who was irrationally certain that somewhere in the past he and Freud had a common ancestor.)

About a month later (continued the Interpersonal), I got a call from a psychiatrist who said he was in charge of Bi's case at her local hospital. It seemed that she had been overcome by anxiety while using her computer, and was under sedation.

"You sound as if she's also in a strait jacket," I said.

"Not yet," said the psychiatrist. "Please tell me everything she told you about her work with the computer. She hasn't told anybody much about it, not even her husband."

"Do you have a signed release?" I asked, remembering more about my ex-roommate, who had been given to threats of lawsuit over trifles, like the time the school paper misprinted her I.Q.

"No."

"I think I'd rather see her," I said.

So I did. They had withheld sedatives; and she was out of bed, sitting up in a chair in her private room. Her face seemed to be carved out of white plaster that might crumble at any moment, and she wouldn't talk.

I talked. She wouldn't respond.

I got up and walked around, kicking the furniture. Finally I said, "Okay, you're the brightest student in school; but you're dumb in the school of life, which is what I've been studying for years. I also know more about people and what happens to them when they decide to collapse. Has your failure with your computer—not finding a cure for cancer—made you decide to enjoy being a mess? When all the other roommates you used to intimidate hear about this . . ."

"You wouldn't!"

"Actually, I don't threaten patients; but you're only an ex-roommate, and you've got plenty of ego left, and I'm not in the mood to let *you* intimidate me with this behavior."

"I never could stand you," she said slowly, "but you're not as dumb as I used to think. You believed me about Charles, didn't you?"



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"I believe that you and that computer of yours may possibly have tuned into DNA molecules that go way back. If you want to drive yourself crazy with a mad passion over a rapscallion of an ancestor . . ."

"He's gorgeous—but he's not the problem. I should have stayed with him."

"I don't understand."

"I should have stayed on that level. You were right about the DNA readout getting hazier and hazier the farther back I went. But I went back, and back, and back. . ." Her voice died out and she began to shake.

"Well, what happened? Scared by *Homo erectus?* Therapsid reptiles? Slimy amphibians? Bony fishes? Amphioxus? Coelenterates?" I paused and she stared at me. "*Amoebae?*"

"Hell, no. I left DNA behind."

"What do you mean?"

"You're the biologist," she said scornfully. "You know that DNA is composed of nucleotides. I looked it up."

"All life is organic chemistry if you dig deep enough."

"That's just it. I had the feeling that I'd latched onto a single atom. There were many I experimented with, but they all petered out so I assume they came from outside my direct line of animal ancestors. I started looking for atoms that have been with my DNA from the beginnings of life on Earth."

"That would be marvelous!"

"Not so marvelous. I think I did it, but I didn't enjoy the trip. Maybe it was a carbon atom, but then it wasn't. I pushed back and back and it seemed as if I were part of a sea—"

"Oh, that's easy," I interrupted, trying to show off my biology. "You were still in a primitive organic molecule in the primordial soup that the sea turned into on Earth, according to one theory I like."

"A sea of *light*, stupid! I may have been in the other kind of sea earlier; but by the time I pushed hard enough, I was in light, and then back into something terrible; and I wasn't even an atom. I was smaller, and trapped in a furnace. I tried to get out by going back even farther, and that was the worst of all. I lost myself. My individuality. I had no identity; and if there's one thing I have always had, it's a definite identity! That's when I broke loose from the computer and cracked up."

The white plaster was beginning to crumble so I hurriedly said, with more than a little exaggeration, since I was still thinking hard,



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"I can explain it all. With your permission, I'll talk to your doctor and sign you out and we'll go to your lab. Try the computer again and then hook me into the same setting that upset you."

"You'd do that for me, when we never liked each other?"

I had to be honest about that. "Mostly for myself."

I was now reminded that her laugh had always resembled the braying of a mule, but it was a relief to hear it.

We went back to her lab; and after she found the setting, she got out of the chair trembling again. "I suppose I trust you, even if you did nearly drive me bananas when you'd stuff each day's newspaper under your mattress when you had the bunk above me."

"I had to. The springs sagged."

"You had no regard for my feelings, which are terribly sensitive. I hated waking up and seeing old headlines above me. And I really hate having you commune with my computer."

"That's obvious," I said, sitting down in the chair. She hooked me up, breathing heavily as she did it; and after a while I said, "Show me how to fiddle with the settings to bring myself up to a more advanced level of evolution."

She did; and I did; and after a bit of surreptitious trembling myself, I said, "I think I've found your problem. Would you get me a glass of water?"

While she was gone, I fiddled with the setting again, letting her catch me at it as she returned with the glass. "Try it at the setting I've got now," I said.

After a while she said, "I think this is the same thing I showed you before, and I hate it. You put the setting back where it had originally been, didn't you?"

"Yes," I lied.

"Then what have we got? What unpleasant state did I get to? That terrible sensation of having no identity, and then when I go forward in time, I'm terribly small and moving awfully fast . . ."

"Whoa!" I said, as her voice rose to a screech. "Remember that when I used the computer I experienced my own preorganic evolution from tuning into whatever molecules have been with me and my ancestors all along. I did the same thing you did. Now two of us have had this charming adventure, and you aren't alone. None of us has ever been alone, come to think of it. Life on Earth developed all of a piece, all interrelated."

"Very poetic. That doesn't explain anything."

"It does. I strongly recommend that you don't make the computer push you back as far as you did, because it will always feel awful.



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Would anyone like to experience, for any length of time, what happens in a supernova?"

"You're kidding."

"No. Biological evolution is an outgrowth of the evolution of organic molecules, and you can't have organic molecules without atoms like carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen, which are made in the furnace of a star."

"Our Sun? Is that where I was?"

"No. That's not where *our* carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen came from. In our volume of space, there were, previously, massive stars which manufactured heavier atoms in their private nuclear furnaces; and when one eventually exploded in a supernova, a cloud of gas containing all those elements spewed out. The force of expansion drove this contaminated gas into other gas clouds and when our second-generation sun coalesced out, it was accompanied by the coalescing planets of its solar system, rich in those elements made by the earlier star."

"The supernova would be that hideous sensation of moving out very fast in a sea of light, but earlier—when I lost myself—"

"You pushed back to when the earlier star was young and you were only a proton in some helium or hydrogen atom. It's understandable that the image—or sensation, or whatever the computer synthesized—was so vivid. Maybe only a portion of your DNA came from that Viking, for instance, but *all* of Earth except its hydrogen and helium goes back to atoms formed by nuclear fusion in primary stars which exploded."

Bi shuddered. "I won't go back there again. Never. I don't like being only a proton." She stretched and yawned, always a good sign after someone has been anxious and intense. "Astronomy bores me anyhow. I like history now that I'm middle-aged."

"And what did Charles the Second look like without his wig?" I asked.

The Interpersonal stopped speaking and reached for an after-dinner mint.

"Are we supposed to gather that your friend is now out of the hospital permanently?" asked the Oldest Member.

"I hope so."

"I don't believe a word of any of this," said a studiously skeptical Pshrink.

"It's quite true," said the Interpersonal. "There really is a computer like that and Heaven help us if it ever gets into the hands of



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the public."

"On the contrary, it's Heaven sent," said a new Pshrink who was having trouble building up his practice. "When people start going back into their ancestry think of all the resulting psychopathology!"

"Wait till the creationists hear about it," said the Oldest Member happily. "They'll have apoplexy and become extinct, one hopes."

The latest Youngest Member, the token psychiatric resident-in-training, cleared his throat nervously and said, "How can your story be true when you said you lied to Bi?"

"Astute of you to notice," said the Interpersonal. "I had to lie. I was afraid Bi would not be able to stand the truth—that I had switched the setting."

"I don't get it," said the Oldest Member.

"When I hooked into the machine," said the Interpersonal, "I sensed what had frightened Bi. I switched it forward in time and found another event which I thought I could more easily explain to her. Then I pretended to let her catch me switching it back again, so that what she saw the second time was not what had scared her."

"I am thoroughly confused, and I knew it was a mistake to let you talk," said the Oldest Member. "You told Bi that she'd seen a primary, first generation star which exploded into a supernova. Didn't she?"

"Yes, the second time. What she found first, when she went back far enough—what she showed me when I tried the computer the first time—was the early history of that first star, which coalesced out of another sea of brightness."

"The Big Bang!" said the Youngest Member.

"That's right. The very beginning of the universe. It's logical, isn't it, that if you push back far enough in time, you'll get to the original explosion that started everything, that everything—every part of every one of us—comes from."

"Why didn't it drive you crazy too?" asked an Eclectic.

"Because I suspected that's what she'd found. It would be an awful shock to anyone just looking for biological ancestors. She got so far back that she did lose all identity, even that as a quark in the hypothetical quark soup that the Universe may have been before the Big Bang. Poor Bi. She's one of those people for whom things have to be individual and relevant and personally important. For her, nothingness is terrifying."

"Nothingness?"

"How else would you describe the sea of nothing-like-anything? The sea without boundaries, without form and dimension, a void



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with only potential—"

"Couldn't you be a little less Biblical?" asked the Oldest Member.

"Having been there, I assure you there's nothing Biblical about it. It's not even scary if you consider that absolute nothingness is at the same time everything. At least it felt as if everything were everything. As if it were Home. I was pleased that I haven't been studying Taoism and Zen for nothing—or do I mean that I *have* been studying them for Nothing?"

"I can't stand this," said the Oldest Member. "I'm going home, and I don't mean to some primordial condition of the universe."

"I think you and your ex-roommate have merely been playing with a computer that whomps up fantasies for you," said a Pshrink who specialized in taking his patients on guided trips through the unconscious. "You see what you want to see, the way patients interpret their dreams."

"And the way some Pshrinks tend to interpret their patients' dreams?" said the Interpersonal.

"I suppose, m'dear," said the Oldest Member, who somehow never left when he threatened to, "that you ought to admit it was only a fantasy. It would be better for your mental health."

"Perhaps you'll all have a chance at the machine some day," said the Interpersonal. "You'd better, because you ought to know what's going to happen to other people who try it. You'll have to teach people what is already being taught in simpler forms of biofeedback—that a person can *choose* what he does with it. You can choose to raise blood pressure instead of lowering it, for instance; but if you're interested in curing your hypertension, you won't. You can also choose what reading to get from Bi's machine—the state of health of a cell's DNA, or where it's been."

The O.M. smoothed down his moustache. "You almost persuade me. Nevertheless, I refuse to approve of your flights—perhaps of fancy—into the past with that infernal machine. I do not approve of computers with pre-oedipal fixations, uncontrollable ids, and delusions of omnipotence."

"Um, yes," said the Interpersonal. "As a matter of fact, the last time I talked to Bi, I asked her about the possibility of constructing a new machine with safeguards built-in to make it focus only on the abnormal DNA of an actual or potential cancer. Perhaps the new machine will ultimately enable humans to cure their own cancers. In the meantime, the original machine can be used exclusively and cautiously for research that I hope to hear about—"

"But *not* participate in!" said the Oldest Member severely. "We



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may have ideational conflicts, but I prefer that you retain *your* identity."

"Thank you! I shall endeavor to retain my own peculiarities uncontaminated by exposure to ancestral personalities or cosmic togetherness."

"Harrumph! I did not mean that improvement was unnecessary. For instance, I am appalled that you seem unconcerned about your ex-roommate's psychodynamics, which are clearly in need of intensive analysis."

"On the contrary," said the Interpersonal. "I have forcefully recommended psychoanalysis for Bi's neurotic preoccupations. Charles the Second, forsooth!" ●

MARTIN GARDNER (From page 103)

## FOURTH SOLUTION TO RUN, ROBOT, RUN!

We won't go through the algebra this time, but if you try any value for $x$ (the distance around the reservoir), you'll find that Farfel would have to make the second trip in *no time at all!* Regardless of the distance, or the speed on the first circuit, in order to raise the average speed for two circuits to twice the first speed, the dog would have to complete the second trip with infinite speed.



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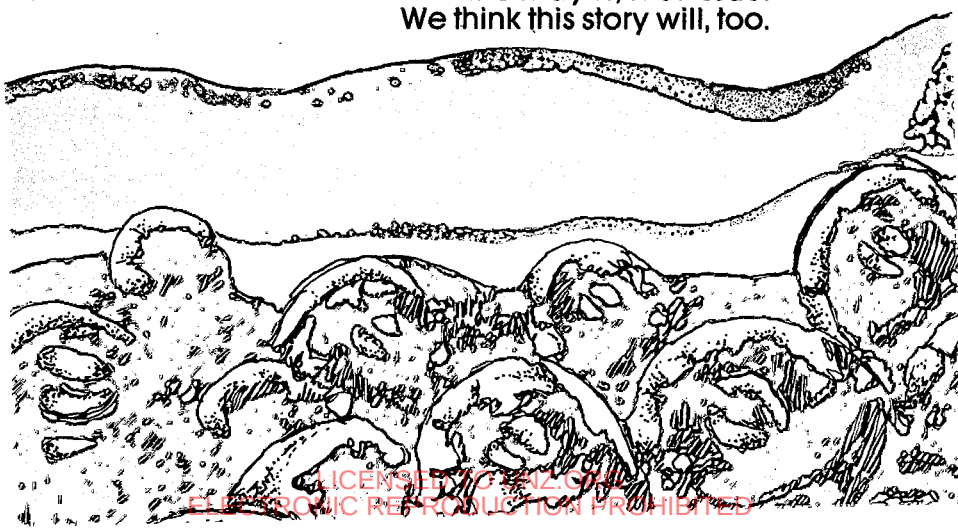
# THE ETERNITY WAVE

art: Val Lakey/Artifact

by Scott Elliot Marbach

The author is employed as a copywriter for an Alabama advertising agency. This is his second appearance in *IAsfm.* His first, "Other Wells, Other Saints," generated a great deal of positive comment when it appeared in the May 11, 1981 issue. We think this story will, too.



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"Brain thief!" *The cries echoed as footsteps clattered down the twilit alley.* "Kill the lousy brain thief!" *There was a shower of stones.*

*I shook off the memory, not sure for a moment if it were even mine. Through the fading fear I could feel the presence of the others in the room. Still, the presence I was seeking with every ounce of my being eluded me.*

*Someone whispered something. It didn't matter; I'm good even when there's noise about. "Come, Julie, come," I pleaded. Prodding in places that had no name, I searched for her, anything of her, any damp stain of her existence on the fabric of the now.*

*"It's no good," I heard Dr. Carbone hiss; and I felt someone nod.*

*In the shadows, someone howled:* "Brain thief!"

*I looked up at them—Carbone in his white coat, beard bristling (I flattered myself) with the energy in the room. Gilchrist had just come in, her tightly-coiffed gray hair almost a halo in the dimness. A thick-shouldered orderly stood to one side, his face turned away from the disaster on the table. I had made them turn off the lights; no need for eyes now.* Julie! *I felt them watching as I searched for her, and now my hatred returned, searing white waves of it. Like an uncaged beast, it roamed free, stretching from its broken bonds, a monster never meant to be tamed. Let it gnaw upon the faces in the dark, let their minds be pierced. Were they stone throwers once—hand crushers—eye gougers? I tried to fix whose mind was crying out the accusation in the alleyway, only to face my own memory hanging blue above my mind's horizon.*

*"Get out!" I barked. "Leave me alone with her!"*

*"There's nothing there, Martin," Carbone said, even-voiced, reasonable.*

*"There's always something," I cried. "Always!" I felt their resignation as, one by one, they turned and left. I was, after all, not of a kind to be reasoned with.*

*I knelt closer to Julie. "Let me find you . . . come to me, please . . . ?"*

*Who could have known, in the silence, that the brain thief was screaming?*

*Who could remember her face as I could?*

The short black girl huddled so close to the leather arm of the couch in Carbone's office that I thought she would grow to it, would have to be surgically removed. Her eyes were clouded with self-defense. A roseate glow of anger made her walnut skin lu-



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minous. Her features were compressed with a rage that could barely be contained.

"I'm not fooling around with any wave-eater," she said.

"Mr. Palmer is a licensed telepath," Carbone said. "And you will work with him. The terms of your maintenance are clear on this point. You're subject to all reasonable research."

She looked at me; I thought her skin would ignite with fury.

"You see?" she flashed. "I'm already written off. Good as gone. Not human. Well, I'm not having you inside what's left of my mind." She closed her eyes and turned away. Then her head snapped around as she fixed me with a wounding glance. "Bonehead!" she spat.

My hand fluttered involuntarily to the ridge of bone in my brow, the congenital badge of my difference. The blood rushed out of my stomach and my defenses ebbed, letting in bits and snatches of mind from all over the hospital. I clenched myself, clearing out the effluvia, the sloughed-off surfaces of people's outer consciousnesses, and reached inside myself for the worst epithet I could find to hurt her with. My mouth formed the word; but at the last moment, I remembered that I was a professional. All that came out was a shred of bleeding breath.

"Go ahead and say it," she challenged. "Do you think *you* can hurt me?"

"I don't want to hurt you," I said, avoiding her eyes.

"Well, you sure as hell can't help me, can you?" She stood, pulling a pair of dark glasses from her shirt pocket. "I *know* you can say it." She put on the glasses. Safe behind them, her face seemed to soften; her voice softened as well. Now I could hear the sadness behind the anger. "It's not such a hard word."

Carbone stood as if to restrain her from leaving the room, but he did not move from his desk. "Julie," he said.

Tear tracks glistened against the brilliant brown of her face.

"Lump," she murmured. Then louder and more clearly: "Lump!" She laughed. "Nothing can hurt me. Not you with your brain-stealing ways. And not you with your threats," she said, pointing unwaveringly at Carbone. "Research to hell, you understand? You can toss me out in the street with the garbage and the dog turds. I'm just another lump. Well, we're all going to hell one way or another!"

She was out the door before either of us could speak. In her place I saw a bright red shadow of pain, a familiar illusion that occurred sometimes when my telepathy collided with my other senses. I blinked and it was gone.



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"I'm sorry," Carbone said. "I didn't know people said things like 'bonehead' anymore."

"You'd be surprised what people say when they think they can get away with it. Well, I don't see forming a sympathy with her. She won't cooperate."

"She has to cooperate," he said. "She has nowhere else to go, and she's under contract to the hospital."

"That's wind. You won't enforce the contract. She knows that. So where does that leave us?"

"With mature cases," he said.

"Ho! With lumps. But that's never been tried successfully. What makes you think I can do it?"

He looked me up and down as if to assess my abilities. I met his gaze, but dodged his aura. I did not want to know what he thought of me.

"You've had some impressive results with dolphins," he said. "Lumps started out as people. That should give you a toe-hold."

"Not necessarily," I pointed out. "You see, I *like* dolphins."

The lump ward was locked. "Why?" I asked as Carbone buzzed for the duty nurse. "I thought there was no danger of contagion." I recalled the literature on the syndrome, the failed epidemiological studies; lumpism claimed its victims, young and old, rich, poor, black, white, male, female, with absolute disregard for the human science of statistics. The correlation between people who had been in contact with lumps (at any stage of the syndrome) and those who had actually lumped was zero.

He buzzed again, impatiently. "No one stumbles in here without knowing exactly what they're going to see. Lumpism's not contagious. But hysteria can be."

The door was finally opened by a hard-edged woman of about fifty. Her whites were crisp and starched, but when she smiled, the edges all blurred and disappeared. "The Grand Hotel," she said. "People come. People go. Nothing ever happens."

"This is Gilchrist," Carbone said. "Day shift. She monitors the mature cases."

"Which means I do nothing," she said. "But I'm a little bit crazy, so I qualify."

The lighting in the ward was heavy on the ultraviolet. Prematurity tropism had been a clue to the need for that. The place felt underwater. As my eyes adjusted, I could see the rows of chest-high stainless-steel trough tables, about forty of them. Each table had its own monitoring hookup. In the event that a lump



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should cease to live, the monitors would scream nineteen kinds of bloody murder. It was seventeen years since the syndrome had been described, seventeen years since the moral decision had been made to maintain the lumps. The bleeding hearts had fought for and won the lumps' right to life. The monitors were quiet. In seventeen years, no lump had died.

I advanced down the aisle, aware that I was still looking straight ahead. Finally, at random, I picked a table, took a deep breath, looked down and saw my first lump.

The only thing ugly about lumps is the fact that they used to be people. Otherwise, all you see is a bluish-gray mass of something that looks like suet. Beneath the surface are two darker masses, shadows in the lump. That's all. It's what you know about the lumps that can make even a hardened medical person run away screaming. This was not the certitude of ashes in an urn, nor the solidity of bones in a casket. Medusa's stone-bound victims were nearer to the truth. Yet here, there was not even the satisfaction of a frozen look of horror. They were featureless, maybe mindless, silent, maybe human.

I laid my hand on the lump. The surface was cool and dry, the temperature of eternal life. "We had a one percent increase in cases last year," Carbone said. "At that rate, we'll be out of holding facilities by the end of next year. The medical insurance companies say the lumps are dead. They won't pay. The life insurance companies say the lumps live. They won't pay. And the Supreme Court is deciding whether or not to hear arguments on Baker versus Idaho. The family wants the victim terminated—the right-to-lifers in the state senate want the lump maintained."

"What's your position?" I asked, hand still on the lump. I felt displaced and yet—I always felt displaced.

"No position," he said. "Only the need to know. Only a desire for the facts—and the ability to act intelligently upon them."

"Leave me here," I said.

"Can you . . . ?" My upraised hand cut his words off. I lowered it so that now I had two hands on the lump. In the background, I felt Carbone and Gilchrist withdraw.

The heat of my hand caused a slight vibration in the—flesh—of the thing. Little ripples skittered across the pool of nutritive fluid in which it lay. Now, for the first time, I identified the source of sweetness in the air of the ward I had noticed before and not attended. The gaseous waste of the lumps was a perfume, strange, seductive, almost dizzying. It filled the air with invisible rainbows.


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I stared at the lump. I had no logical starting place, no certain point of shared conscious experience. I stood there, gazing into the eye of emptiness. It had been easier with Ferdie.

*Ferdie was insane.* But he could not tell me that. I had to learn it for myself.

(I sat in the Ocean World grandstand for a week, watching him perform before I attempted the sympathy. Like most trained dolphins, he was cuter than the family dog, knifing up out of the water through a hoop of fire and back into the tank. Later, under laboratory conditions, I peeled away layer after layer of thought and feeling from his mind, a dolphin mind. They have over eight hundred separate expressions for water. But, as intelligent as dolphins are, they have no way of describing water that is not a part of *the water,* for there is nothing like it outside of captivity, nothing like it in nature from which a dolphin returns alive. Freed dolphins cannot communicate to their companions just what it is they have been through. Ferdie could not even tell himself. He swam and swam, unable to accept that no matter how long he swam or how far, he could never swim back to *the water.* He chittered in his endearing dolphin way, threw back his head for fish-largesse, took another hoop and swam—completely out of his mind.)

The lump quivered palpably. There was something there.

No. There was nothing. The perfume grew stronger; the lump shivered again. Was it calling me? Did it have eight hundred expressions for nothingness?

I withdrew my hands. The clock on the wall said less than thirty minutes had passed; my knees ached as though I had stood there for hours. My hands reeked with lump perfume. Carbone was waiting in the hall.

"I sent Gilchrist on a break. It gets pretty boring in there, hour after hour. Did you connect?"

I flexed my knees, trying to ease out the knots. "If I did," I said, "I don't know what I connected with. Julie is still our best bet. If I can forge a link with her before she goes through the change, I might be able to hold on to her essence once she becomes . . ."

Of course, I had always known; but now the knowledge glared at me. I had not really made the connection until that moment. The newness of the job, the strangeness of the surroundings and always, the people looking surreptitiously over their shoulders at me had blurred the issues. Now that crazy fragrance, the spicy sweet odor on my hands assaulted me with the realization that



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only time stood between the angry girl on Carbone's couch and the shapeless things in the ward.

"How far advanced is she?" I asked.

"The beginning," said Carbone. "Major tropism. Some small softening of the larger bones, but nothing as yet critical. She won't be crippled or blind for maybe seven months yet. After that, the cellular changes are geometric. We still don't know how or why. The genetic material recodes itself almost overnight. Every new cell the body produces is lump specific. Cell growth is faster than normal. She'll lump over in just under eighteen months."

"God," I whispered. But I didn't believe in the god who had created boneheads and lumps.

In the cafeteria, I sat and sipped coffee, wondering what I had or had not felt in my contact with the lump. I was certain that for just a microsecond I had bumped against a door behind which lay something like mind. Again, it was only a random contact, and I had not been in anything like true sympathy; that would take time if it were possible at all. It had been merely a brush, then, with the air around the lump. Despite scrubbing, the perfume clung to my hands.

What would they smell like, burning? If the Supreme Court ruled the lumps not human, then without a doubt their future lay in a crematorium. Many people were passionately involved with the legal and moral issues. It was certainly a fascinating puzzle to me, but more than that, it was a job. This was how I made my rather handsome living. This was how I stayed above. . . .

*"Mommy! Look!"*

*"Don't point at the bonehead, dear. He'll come and snatch your brain while you're asleep."*

*"Brain thief!"*

I spilled my coffee, hands on the table, preparing to take shelter from whatever was thrown. There were only a handful of doctors and nurses in the cafeteria, who, after looking up, turned discreetly away, knowing it was not polite to stare. And all the while, someone was remembering for me what I could never forget.

The black-robed judge of society pointing down with his gavel and growling: "Not human."

To hell with them all. Suddenly, I could feel Julie's anger, railing against a situation over which she had no control. She and I, like poor crazy Ferdie, had to keep on swimming.

*"Wear your hat, darling, if you're going out. That's right, nice and low on your forehead."*



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That was a memory of my own. To hell with them all. There was a sip of coffee left in the cup. What was Julie's sorrow compared to mine? I had stopped feeling sorry for myself long ago, hadn't I? Then I would not feel sorry for her. I swallowed the last of the coffee and strode out of the cafeteria, my heavy head held as high as I could manage it. I had a job to do.

She sat in her room, back to the door, her gaze fixed on the window to the street. Light from the deepening afternoon sun streamed through the wiry curls of her hair like the beads of an eclipse.

"Listen," I said. She did not turn. Then I saw the dark glasses where she had tossed them to the pillow. Her hands were tightly wrapped around the arms of the chair.

I stepped up behind her and placed a hand before her face, blocking the sunlight. A moment later she let go a choked squeal and twisted in the chair. She stood up, hands waving in front of her as if to sweep away the dancing phosphenes that crowded her vision.

I handed her the sunglasses; she got them on her face clumsily. I felt as though I had come upon her naked.

"You," she finally said.

"You were in tropism," I said. "You should be be more careful. Do you want to be blinded?"

"Now or later," she said flatly. "It hardly matters. And I've already lost my reading vision. The first time I got stuck on the sun—that's how I knew I was sick."

"And what did you do?"

"Hell! I danced in the streets! What do you think I did? You know, for a wave-eater, you don't get much."

"There doesn't seem to be much to get," I said, hand on the doorknob. "I'm sorry I interrupted your coma."

"What do you want from me?" she cried. "Why do you want to go messing around in my brain? What good can it do?"

"None at all," I said, "until you demonstrate that you have one."

"Don't say that! I'm still human . . . still . . . now. . . ." The air went out of her. She sat back down facing the window. The dark glasses kept the light below trigger level; but she might as well have been in tropism. Every muscle in her body was tensed, the cords in her neck bulging as she stared down at the world below. Then, almost imperceptibly, a sob raised itself and ebbed. It was followed by another. She raised her hand to her eyes, poking a finger beneath the glasses to grab at the tears.



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"I'm supposed to be learning to keep from crying," she sniffed. "I'm not learning real well. You've never seen me but that I was crying."

"I suppose that people have to cry," I suggested.

"Do they? Do you know? Do you cry?"

"Not for a long time," I said; the words tingled with present danger. "But I'm not people."

Another sob hit her like a punch. "Oh," she moaned, "I'm so sorry."

"For what?"

"For calling you bonehead. I should have known better. And you just sat there and took it."

"That's my job. You put out—I take in. I don't judge the quality."

"But I *am* sorry. Don't you care?"

"No," I said. "That's not my job."

"I guess it'll be easier that way," she said, gathering in her breath and staunching the tears. "It's hard with Carbone. He cares. And he knows he can't help me. Deep inside, I think he wishes the problem would just go away. But lumps don't go away. They just . . . "

A whiff of that strange perfume blew through my memory.

"When my husband found out what I had, he filed for divorce. I haven't seen him since they brought me here."

"You have nothing left to lose," I pointed out.

She stood up ramrod straight and faced me, staring me down through her smoky lenses. "I have everything to lose! This," she cried, holding up her right hand, spreading the fingers. "And this," she said, laying that hand across her breasts. "And this," she said, opening her arms to embrace the air of the room. "I will lose them, piece by God-loving piece. They say there's no pain. They say it just happens. No pain! Oh, Lord! Now what can you do for me that the doctors have not already done? Do you have the cure? I'm going to lump and nothing you can do can keep it from happening. So I hope you don't mind if I invite you to leave my room, because I'm very busy. I have to get on with my disintegration."

"All for nothing, Julie?"

"For what else, if not nothing? Lots of nothing. Years of nothing. Maybe ages."

"Something to hold on to," I whispered. "If there is life after lumping, if there's something out there, there's a chance we can hold on to the human part of you. Let me link with your mind



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now. There are no guarantees. But holding on to that connection—you might have something to reach out for—after you . . ."

"Lump," she said.

"Yes."

"And that something to reach out for—that someone—that would be you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, God!" she howled. "God who isn't there, who isn't listening, who never was! Get out! Get out! Get out!

I stood there dumbly listening to her storm. There was something pure about it, something nearly beautiful. I heard her anger, felt it, but did not connect it with myself. For almost a moment, I was almost touched.

"You! I'm talking to you! Go!"

"I do better with dolphins," I mumbled unaccountably, and left.

After three days in the lump ward, the world seemed incomplete without the musky breath of the lumps. I was pushing for a breakthrough; my brain ached with hubris. I was getting nowhere. After reading the case histories, I selected Alison Herbert, who had been mature for only eight months. While I had no idea whether the process of lumping had an unseen continuing effect after the physical manifestation was complete, there was the premise I was working from: young lumps are easier to reach than old ones.

*"Alison. You are twenty-three years old. You were a schoolteacher. You were a blond Caucasian American female, pregnant with her first child. You miscarried before you lumped. Do you remember: Sky? Air? Skin? Music? Words? Food?"*

Nothing.

I glanced down at the monitors. They all told the same story. Electrical activity, both on the surface of the lumps and generated from within, registered brief, tight spiky patterns which quickly smoothed out to the thin wavering line whose clinical name was "eternity wave." The bursts of activity interrupted the eternity wave with complete unpredictability, sometimes coming several close together, and sometimes stretched few and thin for days on end. The variations on the burst patterns were endless; several hospital computers had failed to detect a relationship between them. Each had an exquisite individuality, never duplicated.

If the eternity wave was a form of sleep, however, then there might be a way to reach the lumps. But I hoped that it was not



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so, because dream sympathy can be terrifying—and dangerous, since you have to be asleep and defenseless to achieve it.

*"Alison."*

The eternity wave rolled onward.

"You look like you're praying."

I spun around, the blood rushing from my stomach. They were coming to get me and hang me on the schoolyard fence. . . .

"Come on," said Julie. "I haven't turned that ugly that fast."

I breathed deeply, trying to make my muscles stop twitching.

"Well," she said, "I can see that you're busy."

"I didn't hear you buzz," I finally sputtered, holding back my anger. "I was in sympathy."

"Gilchrist was on her way out for a smoke. She let me in. I come here now and then. To learn."

My blood had stopped pounding now. "What do you learn?"

She shrugged. "What arms and legs and eyes and ears are for, I guess. I come here to pray, too."

"And do you get answered?"

"Is anybody answering you?"

"Not yet," I admitted.

"Me either," she said. "They told me you would be here."

"Every day," I said.

She walked down the aisle between the tables, placing a hand here and there on a lump. Occasionally, she would whisper something I could not hear.

"Does it help you—to see them?" I called to her at the other end of the ward.

"Quiet!" she hissed. "You'll wake the babies." She came back to Alison's table. "Sometimes I sing them lullabies," she said. Her eyes were hidden behind the dark glasses. She sang: "Hush little baby, still those cries. Momma's gonna give you back your eyes. And if those eyes can't see no light, Momma's gonna rock you through the night. And if that night should last too long, Momma's gonna learn another song."

Silence fell between us like the blade of a guillotine. I was tempted to reach into her then, tempted to go in and, with strong fingers, pull out the hurt. The temptation passed, and I couldn't have done that, even if I had wanted to.

"Are you crying?" I asked.

"No."

"Do you want something?"

"Yes," she said. Then she was silent.

"Am I supposed to guess what it is?"



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"Can't you reach in and find out?"

Something caught in my throat. People do not know me. People are not allowed to know me. How had she known?

"I wouldn't do that, Julie. Not without your permission. I could get my license revoked."

"I wouldn't tell," she whispered.

"Why don't you just tell me what you want, Julie? It would be easier. It would save us time."

"So you're gonna make me say it. Okay. Here it is. I want to know if you're worth reaching out for. From there." She pointed to the lump that had been Alison Herbert. "Are you?"

It was an annoyingly intelligent question. "I'm the only game in town, Julie. You pay the dealer and you pick up your cards."

"Uh-huh." She turned and strolled away from me down to the end of the aisle of tables, humming her cruel lullaby. Her arms were crossed upon her chest as if she could rock the whole world to sleep, governess of the lump nursery, singing to her charges with tightly wound fury. From across the room, she turned to face me with something that could have been malice—or a new face for pain.

"Kiss me," she said. She took off the sunglasses and dangled them in one hand, walking toward me with cool determination. Her eyes were the color of the room, dusk from lid to lid. I tried to step backward, but my feet would not work. "Kiss me, Martin." She was the most terrifying thing I had ever seen. This was not in my contract—this could not be allowed. Her hand was on my shoulder. I was paralyzed, deafened by the clangor of every alarm in my nervous system screaming danger. Numbed, my mind scrambled desperately to be someplace else.

*They stun your brain and they rape you when you can't even feel it. They're worm-eating, brain-thieving degenerates!*

"No," I mumbled with all I could pull together. She found my mouth then and pressed her lips against it. Everything was all mixed together—the salt taste of her tongue, the clutching sweetness of the lumps, the faint hum of the monitors, the arctic mass in my stomach. She pulled back, not smiling.

"You taste just like regular people," she murmured, stroking my bony brow. "We can start tomorrow." As though blown by the wind, she was at the door of the ward, and through it out of sight.

My breath would not come. I placed my hands on my chest and pressed, gasping. I was a fish out of water—water that was not part of the water. I stood for a long time, wondering where Gilchrist was, eyeing the door of the ward as though new horrors



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could at any moment burst in and sweep me away. Eventually the trembling stopped.

The kiss was never mentioned. As we worked together over the next weeks, I went into parts of her mind, uncovering her past, her feelings, her (now dead) aspirations, but at the hint of an association that tied in with her reasons for assaulting me, I shied away. You might think that such an impulse would leave its footprints in every part of the psyche; would scream to call attention to itself. Not true. Some things we package carefully and hide away. Others are so brief, burn so brilliantly for such a short time that they leave only ashes in the landscape of the mind.

"Seems like it was a pretty average childhood," I said as we wound up for the afternoon. We worked in her room with the door closed. From time to time, some curious presence would post itself at the door, wondering, perhaps what the bonehead was doing to the nice young woman. Then, hearing no agonies, no tortures, no cries for mercy, the presence would fade.

"You never tell me what you've found," she said. Her sunglasses tossed twin bars of white fluorescent light at me.

"Most people don't want to know," I said wearily. The chill of contact was slowly fading. "That's why we're hated and feared. We're privy to secrets that people want kept at any cost—even from themselves."

"Sure," she pouted. "They have a whole lifetime to discover what's inside." It was her constant complaint. "People grow old. They have a history they can look back on and try to understand."

"So do you."

"At my age! What history have I got?"

"Look, Julie—people your age step off curbs every day and get hit by busses. Bang. No more history."

"Go to hell."

"Fine." I wanted to get away. I still had work in the lump ward. Alison remained unyielding, but I had a persistent feeling that the effort must continue even now that Julie had agreed to work with me.

"You're so cold," she said.

"Sue me," I snorted, praying that she would not take off her glasses. When she did, her eyes could pin me to the wall, accusing, pleading, sometimes even laughing. I hated the feeling, the unaccustomed familiarity that stung and scraped—like the kiss.

"Say something," she prodded gently. "Tell me about you. I don't know anything about you."



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I shook my head.

"Say something, Martin!"

"No."

"Gotcha!" she laughed.

"Dammit, Julie!"

"Why, Martin? Why? Where is it written that this has to be a one-way street? It's pretty boring, you know—this sitting here thinking about myself, hour after hour. You're no company at all. You treat youself like a machine. Just soak up my thoughts and thank you ma'am! I get more stimulation out of the babies!"

"Give it a rest, Julie. I'm doing my job. What more do you want?"

"Want? Something of *you*. Anything. Pretend you're alive, for pity's sakes. Tell me a joke!" She took off the glasses.

"Be careful!" I snapped. A sharp blade of afternoon sunlight gleamed beneath the edge of the windowshade, cutting the room in half. "You'll drop right into tropism."

"Stand there with a straight face and tell me you give a damn," she shouted. "Say, 'Julie, I'd prefer you conscious.' "

She threw a hand to her hip, daring me. This was a trap. I could feel my objectivity flowing away, leaving me naked. Anger saved me. *How dare she? How damn dare she?* My words came out calmly, knowing their purpose.

"On the other hand, it might be interesting to attempt contact with you while you're troping. Could get us closer to the lumps."

"Bastard," she said.

"Don't ever forget it," I agreed.

"But you promised. . . ."

Yes, I thought. Later. When you're a lump, and I'm walking around living and breathing this blighted life of mine. I must have thought too hard. Her face froze.

She turned to step into the light, but I was too fast for her. I spun her around by the shoulders; we stood locked eye to eye.

"Julie. I don't want to hurt you. But you see? It just happens. I'm made that way. You want more from me and there is nothing here."

"There's always something," she said weakly.

"Nothing—never has been. Scratch the surface and you'll find—okay—not emptiness. Something worse. An odor. Something that used to be contempt and hatred for everything that moves and breathes, except dolphins. If you think the lumps smell, then push me too far. What's in me now is only numbness. But it stinks. Do you understand? Now put your glasses on."



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She did. I left the room without looking at her again.

In the corridor, I leaned against the wall and breathed deep of the sick-charged air. I closed my eyes against the harsh light and tried to forget what I had seen on her angry face. Around her eyes, tiny but inarguable, were the little clusters that looked like cholesterol deposits, but were not. They screamed from her flesh, beginnings of the end. I did not care. I could not care.

Another deep breath and I was at the elevator, on my way to the lump ward. I needed the perfume, the deep scent of unthinking, unfeeling cosmic solitude. I needed the mental flexion of calling out to Alison and hearing the silence with which she always answered. I needed the endless twilight of the nursery —no—ward.

Gilchrist unlocked the door. "They're all busy playing bridge," she said. "It's the tournament finals. No one's gonna win, though. They all cheat."

I grunted.

"Bad day, huh? Listen—just spend eight hours every day doing nothing but waiting for one of those things to sprout wings and take off. Then come to me for a little sympathy. The old-fashioned kind."

"Sprout wings?" I asked, distracted.

"My personal theory," she explained, "is that one day they're all going to turn into butterflies."

"That makes as much sense as anything else I've heard." Recently, a cult had sprung up that believed the lumps to be the eggs of the Messiah.

"Butterflies," smiled Gilchrist. "Take my word. Carbone wants to see you."

"He's anxious for my latest no-progress report. Thanks. I'll just poke around here a bit first."

"I'll be out in the hall, then. Sin of tobacco, don'cha know."

I watched her leave with relief. Gilchrist was nice—at any rate, inoffensive. But the lumps knew what I knew. People only seem to be made of flesh and blood. In truth, people are made of nonstop, nails-on-the-blackboard noise.

Alone with the lumps, I paused, then reached. Nothing. Starting with Alison, I moved from table to table, dipping, scanning, prodding in the same fruitless way I had been for weeks. It was worse than usual. My concentration was off. Then I caught it—the sound of my own voice, mumbling tunelessly: "Hush little baby, still those cries. . . ."

Dammit.



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Yes, yes, yes, it was so sad. A healthy young woman condemned to become—this. I looked down at a suety lump. Yes, a tragedy. What person could be unmoved by Julie's pain? It was a waste of life, full, vibrant life, eager to be shared. *Not my problem.* But I could not blame her for asking me to make what was left a little more enjoyable. Her husband had left her, her eyesight was going, and now the flesh had taken the first step in a long and final failure.

" . . . and if that night should last too long . . ."

What sort of man had she been married to? One thing was certain—black or white, he was a normal man. They had done normal things together, and probably dreamed about having normal babies—fat, healthy, plan-for-the-future babies.

Unless one of them turned out to be a freak like me.

Her face. Her voice. Her anxious, animated hands. I saw them lumpen, stretched out pale and thin across the eternity wave. *Not my problem!* These were the concerns of normal men. Didn't she know? Didn't she think? It was wrong of her to ask me for anything as human as a joke—much less a kiss! She belonged to a world where boneheads were incapable of love. Boneheads don't have a thought or emotion they haven't stolen. Boneheads are dead inside, can't feel, can't cry. And I wasn't crying now. I was only thinking about it the way cripples think about walking someday and young men doomed to be virgins think about what might, in another world, follow a kiss.

The lumps, as always, were silent. But the perfume was choking me. I needed to breathe my own air, think my own thoughts—be alone. I burst out into the hall, and the shock on Gilchrist's face told me something about my own.

"Carbone . . ." she began.

But I was already at the elevator, already in my mind, farther away than any of them could ever travel. I had had enough.

I was drunk, deeply, happily listening to my body cells absorb the alcohol. Time had gotten away from me. The daylight was shut out of my apartment by heavy curtains, but I could tell it was day from the desperation all around me. Even the runoff from nightmares is peaceful compared to the daily living, the here-to-there hysteria of human beings. The doorbell was distant music, then nearer shouting then upon me, pain. I answered in self-defense.

"Three days," Carbone said when I let him in.

"Drunk all three," I muttered. "Get on with it."



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"It?"

"The lecture. Professional ethics. The profession through which I'm graciously allowed to live in this society."

"You seem to have it under control, Martin. I won't waste my breath."

"Don't. Because I've lost my objectivity. I can't go on without it."

"Is that really so important?" He sat down in one of my spartan armchairs, twisting to find a comfortable position. "In a case like this, perhaps objectivity . . . "

"It is the most important thing! It's part of the pledge I took when I got my license. 'To learn without judging, to feel without feeling, to honor the privacy of the mind in accordance with the laws that govern that sacred precinct.' Without objectivity, I'm useless to you."

He cleared his throat, looked around the living room which was strewn with the litter of my bender. "You judge every day."

"Shut up. This is my home."

"You judge the world for its imperfections. . . ."

"It's my right. I'm one of them."

". . . and you do feel, don't you, Martin?"

"What do you know about it? How can you know anything about it? Julie knows more than you do—she's closer to it than you'll ever be. And I couldn't even *begin* to talk to her about it."

He stood, finding the chair impossible. "Don't you want to know how she is?"

"I don't care."

"I think you do. I think you hate that you do."

"Leave. I quit. It's not my problem anymore."

"I'm not questioning your integrity here, Martin. But I need to understand the problem."

I looked around the room, trying to find something to focus upon. My few possessions had suddenly become alien to me. I could only be at home here when I was alone. Worse—Carbone's voice was soothing and I did not want to be soothed. He came to my side, touched me on the shoulder—so fatherly—like the father who left my mother when he found out what he had sired.

"Talk to me about it, Martin. You need to talk."

"I don't talk. I don't *need* anything. You don't know me."

He withdrew his hand. "Did you care this way for Ferdie?"

"Ferdie was insane!"

"And Julie is a living, breathing, human being."

"Lumping. . . ."



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"Living until she does—and needing. . . ."

"I hate what she needs! I hate being her only hope. I hate how you're using me to still her desperation and lead her quietly off into oblivion. I won't be part of it!"

"That's a very comforting lie you've concocted for yourself," he said, pulling gently at his beard. I marveled at his need to be touching, touching, always touching something. My shoulder was still warm where he had lain his hand.

"The truth is I have nothing to offer. I told her that."

"And she believes it?"

"I believe it! Now leave me alone. Have mercy on a freak!"

"Keep waving that banner, Martin. Keep prizing your difference. Blame the human race. How were you ever licensed?"

"I'm good! That's how!"

"I know that," he said with a tiny smile. "You're the one who seems to be in doubt. Come back for professional pride, then. Not because you care about Julie. Not because you care enough to learn what we set out to learn. Not because you care. Come back because you're good."

I tried to stare him down. My eyes wanted only to close.

"Go to hell," I offered. "And take your self-righteous sermons with you."

"I can't force you to grow up," he said evenly, "but I can order you to do your job. We have a contract. I'll bring it before the licensing board if I have to."

"You wouldn't."

"Wouldn't I? I suppose you should never have made the switch from dolphins to human beings; but when I'm finished with you, you'll be lucky to be working with earthworms."

I stepped back, horrified, but not surprised. "So after all that," I said, "it's a matter of power. The nice normal man talks about caring to the nasty little bonehead. When that doesn't work, it's power, pure and simple."

"Power, power, power," he said, walking to the door. "Pure, but never simple. Tomorrow. Nine A.M. Be there sober." He let himself out.

I laid down on the bed, aching with alcohol and truth, trying to sleep. Unfortunately, my head had begun to clear.

"How are you feeling?" I said. Cool light streamed in from the corridor behind me. It was late, and in her room with the lights off I could just see the outlines of her face. She lay on her back, hands clenching knots of sheet.



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"Like a lump," she murmured.

"Don't," I said, reaching for the lamp.

"No," she cried, rolling over on her side, face to the wall. "Who asked you to come back? Carbone?"

"I came to . . . "

"To see the poor sick lady. . . ."

"To tell you a joke."

"*That's* a joke. You couldn't laugh if your life depended on it."

I let the door fall closed behind me. "There was this bonehead," I said. "And he walks into a bar and orders Scotch neat. And the bartender serves it up and says, 'that'll be twenty-seven fifty.' So the bonehead pays up, and while he's sitting there nursing the drink the barkeep decides to get friendly. 'We don't see many boneheads in here,' he says. The bonehead closes his eyes for a minute, like he's thinking. Then he finishes his drink and he says: 'You're cheating on your wife, you're wearing women's underwear, you water the whiskey, and when you saw me walk in here, you quadrupled the price of the drink. And, at these prices, you won't see many more.' "

She began to giggle. "Is it funny?" I asked. Suddenly she was flying away on gusts of laughter.

"Funny?" she sputtered. "It's hateful. Really hateful. And besides," she said, trying to catch her breath, "I've already heard it."

"Oh. Have you heard the rest? Do you know what happened next?"

"I didn't know there was any more," she said, finally in control.

"Oh, yes. The bartender got angry. He called the Psych-Squad. They pulled in the bonehead for illegal dipping, took him to the hospital and separated him from his frontal lobes. Cured his drinking problem too."

She fell back to her pillow, eyes on the ceiling. "Thanks a lot, Martin. For a moment, there, I thought you were going to be real. I guess I should have known better."

For a moment, I had thought so too. "Look, I tried to get Carbone to stop the project. I seem to make you so unhappy."

"That too will pass," she said, hugging herself.

"But he's making me continue."

"So what do we do now?"

"I don't know," I said. "Pretend to work. Make a show of it."

"That suits me fine," she said, sitting up to face me from the shadows. "You can start by pretending that I'm no longer interested in talking to you."



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"Yes," I said, but stood where I was.

"You're still here," she pointed out. "Or are you pretending that you've left?"

Without warning, I dipped into her so quickly that the contact chill hurt me. It was no crime, even without her consent; we were under contract. She stiffened beneath the blow, trying to fight me off. The fingers of my mind skillfully dodged her darts and feints. I skimmed effortlessly through the stratosphere of her feelings, turning a wing to the rarified wind, then dove, all the while girding myself against her contempt. There was no contempt. Anguish, disappointment, pity—these were there—and pain so sharp I felt it would pierce me and send me plummeting earthward. I kept on probing. There was something I needed to know. She twisted, pulled back, turned and snarled.

*"Just because I wanted to! Just because you were there! Because your skin was warm and whatever's out there waiting for me looks so cold. Why didn't you just ask me? Ask me? Ask me?"*

I broke the contact, shivering.

"I would have told you," she sobbed. "You could have just asked."

"I didn't know how."

She rubbed her arms against the cold. In the glow of the streetlamps, six stories below, she looked disquietingly transparent. The room took on the twisting aspect of a dream. I moved closer to the bed.

"It hurt," I told her. "It hurt when you kissed me."

"It's not supposed to hurt," she said.

"And it hurts to think. . . ."

"Come here," she said.

"If I were a real person and you weren't sick . . ."

"This is the world," she said, tears breaking her voice. "This. Here. Now. Nothing else."

"I can't."

"Pretend, Martin. Pretend you care."

Then she was at my side, as she had been in the nursery, and as in the nursery, there was perfume, an odor of heat, sweet like the lumps, but wretchedly, beautifully, hatefully human. We had carried that smell away from the ward and transformed it with our bodies. She touched my cheek. Something inside screamed: *You can't do this!* I touched her face, letting a finger wander to the new, frightening blemishes around her orbits. "No," she said, and I let my hand fall to the hollow of her neck where the skin was untouched by the future.



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She turned her face up to me. I leaned down.

*You can't do this!*

And found her mouth warm and waiting. She wrapped her arms around me, pulling me closer. I could not find air to breathe; she breathed for both of us. It hurt. I tried to pull away, but she mistook the motion, or refused it, and pressed harder against me. It hurt terribly. It was the pain of Ferdie's tender snout poking at the wall of the tank, looking for the rest of the water which reality dictated must be there, which reality withheld.

Her voice in my ear: "Make love to me, Martin. Make love to me as if I were still human."

Then, someone stroked her skin. Someone tenderly pulled away her clothes. Someone explored her body. Someone found a way to make it sing. Someone's human body joined with her human body, made human sounds, touched, pressed, sweated heat and new perfume.

From someplace far across the room I watched someone make love for the first time.

*Alone with her, I strained and pushed, blindly stumbling along the upward path to find the coldest ember of her being. All my years of hiding from life, all my isolation, each singular memory paraded before me, mocking. Here I was, exposed, no longer caring what anyone thought of me, because only Julie mattered. Only Julie could give me the answer I needed—that I had done my best. That I was not to blame.*

*I touched her. With my hand. She was cool and dry, the temperature of eternal life. "Julie!" I cried long and loud with my voice, the wrong instrument, the wrong time. She was tuned to a different scale now. What music was there?*

*The door behind me opened quietly. Carbone stepped back in.*

*"Give it up, Martin. There's nothing there."*

*"Teach me," I snarled. "Teach me now about caring!"*

*My teacher lay on the table so far away in a place where oceans are puddles and it rains God's tears.*

"There's nothing there," she said. I looked up over Alison Herbert, breaking my concentration as I did, to see Julie on her crutches. In the unsteady blueness of the lump ward, in the haze between telepathic thought and consciousness, her appearance was shocking—but only until real time pulled itself together in my mind. I had been living with the changes day by day, trying



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not to notice them until, with a sort of group personality of their own, they presented themselves for my inspection.

"You look tired," she said. "Why do you keep trying? The babies won't talk."

The color had gone out of her hair. A scape of creamy mottlings had spread across her face. Her posture was curving inward with the progressive softening of her bones. And yet, I marveled constantly at how much punishment the human form could take and still remain convincingly human. She hobbled over to my side of the table.

"Wait," she said. "Wait for me to go. I'll take you there. I'll give you the secret."

I pulled her up against me, still, months later, aghast in my soul at the touch of flesh, the heat of intimacy. "Are you frightened?"

"No," she said. "There's nothing to be frightened of. Yes. Yes. I'm frightened."

"I know you are."

"You know too damn much, lover."

Over the dandelion puff of her hair, I saw Gilchrist advancing upon us with determination.

"Carbone's on his way here," she said to Julie. "And if he finds you gallivanting around he's gonna chain you to your bed until you get smart."

"I'm not a lump yet," Julie growled. "There's plenty of time left to lie still and. . . ." We could see the strength go out of her as she spoke.

"That's right, honey," Gilchrist comforted. "Fight like a tiger. Come on, kitten. I've got a wheelchair outside."

"Ohhhhh," Julie moaned. "Martin, come soon."

"Just a while longer," I assured her.

"Don't make me wait forever," she called from the door, hanging on Gilchrist's arm for support. "Forever," she said again and laughed.

I looked down at Alison. The ghost of Julie's face gathered itself in the lump, blown away by the breeze as Carbone came into the ward.

"You and Julie," he said. "I asked for a link. I got a link."

"Don't gloat. You've got that I-knew-you'd-thank-me-someday tone in your voice."

"And you sound just like a human being. Why don't you admit that it's not so bad?"

I pointed to Alison. "That's why."



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"Oh."

"So thanks for nothing." I squeezed my eyes tightly. "No. It's something. I just need to stay strong. Frank—I'm gonna cry."

"Don't cry, Martin. Because I'll have to stand here and tell you that it's all right to cry—and I don't have the time for it now. Time just became our enemy. Baker versus Idaho is on the calendar for the coming session. Four weeks. That's all the time we have. If the Supreme Court rules the lumps dead, then. . . ."

"But Julie won't be mature for seven months yet. I know the link is strong. I know it'll stand up to the change—if there's anything left of her, I'll be able to find it."

"In four weeks it may not matter. This ward could be empty. And Julie could be facing a crematorium—whatever's left of her."

I pressed my hands against Alison's table. "Then it's all been for nothing. All this pain! I watch her get worse every day, and every day I make the adjustment as though a little piece of her weren't going forever. What do I get out of this?"

"Martin. . . ."

"You normals run this world as if you were the only thing in it!" I accused. "Why did I bother? How did I let you talk me into this?"

"Should I have let you quit?" he demanded. "Would you have been happier?"

"I wouldn't have known how unhappy I really was. At least that."

"Live and learn," he said.

"Drop dead."

"With time, inevitable," he said. "Go ahead and cry if you have to. But do it now and get it over with."

"And then?"

"Find a way, Martin. Get through to the lumps. Break through now."

Time had always been the enemy. All that had changed for Julie and me was the degree of urgency. Now I wanted the answer for her—not for a bloodless court of normals. Another fruitless week went by. Her voice seemed to tick away the seconds.

"I'll never know you," she whispered on the edge of sleep. In the narrow hospital bed, we were one flesh wrapped in darkness.

"Sleep," I said.

"You're hiding out there. Holding back. You give charity."

Her voice faded. I touched her, carefully, for a touch could break a bone.



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. "You're the charity man. . . ." Sleep claimed her; the crook of my arm cradled her head. Gently, I slipped out of the bed and settled myself in the chair by the window. I need very little sleep, but I must be alone to have it. Dreams rampaging wild and free, as close as the pillow beside me, can ravage me, shred my mind, tear the endings off of nerves. And Julie's dreams were horrible.

In a little while, I would go to the room Carbone had set aside for me, and take a nap. Now, I watched her sleep. The gentle heave of her breath rose up and down a tidal swell. In the pale shadows of the streetlights below, she looked like a tiny pool of water perturbed by a vagrant wind.

"Who are you?" I whispered soundlessly. "What have you turned me into?" A human being, Carbone had said. But surely there must be more to being human than this—more than desperate clutching for flesh in the night. More than pain. Suddenly, I missed Ferdie as if a part of my body had dropped off.

There would be no nap. I walked out into the corridor, to the surgeon's lounge which was empty. I ran the water in the modular kitchen sink and splashed it on my face. When I looked up into the mirror above the sink, I saw a stranger.

Then I heard her scream. I tried to lock in on her mind as I ran back down the corridor, but wherever she was was too far away. A nurse was halfway through the door to Julie's room when I got there. I waved her away and pushed in.

She writhed on the bed, twisted up in the covers, virtually boneless. She screamed again. "Fingers! Give them back! Give them back!"

"Julie! Wake up!"

"Brain! Stop thief!"

I could have shaken her awake if it would not have broken her in two. I stood there helplessly as she screamed again. Then she slumped upright, eyes open, lambent with the streetlamp glow. I hesitated only a moment, then reached for the light switch. It was as though the sun had crashed through the ceiling and fallen into the room. She froze, a stream of saliva dripping from the corner of her pale white mouth, her head turned up to worship the fluorescence.

With a jeweler's fingers, I slipped the sunglasses onto her face. She breathed once, then again, frayed threads of air, trying to weave a word. "Martin."

"Nightmare," I said.

"No."

"Bad, bad dream."



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"No."

"Sleep again, Julie."

"Martin?" Her voice was from another place now, dyed bright red by fear. I dipped into her mind but was turned away by the brilliant memory of the light. "I was there," she moaned. "There. There. There where there is no there. I was with them, Martin. With the lumps."

"Remember," I said.

"I can't."

"Please," I begged.

She fell back to the pillow. "I can't." Her voice turned old and distant.

"Liar, Martin. Liar. You say you care about me. But it's them, isn't it? You love the lumps! You love. . . ." she mumbled, then dropped back to sleep. I turned off the lights and pulled the glasses from her head, wondering if she had truly been awake and aware of what she was saying.

"I'll hate you for this," she said.

Carbone slipped the needle beneath her skin so deftly that she did not wince. Or had the capacity for physical pain already been stolen from her?

"And you," she told Carbone.

I watched as the soporific spread its velvet hands across her eyes.

"No you won't," Carbone said warmly.

"It wasn't supposed to be this way." Her voice was already muffled by the drug. "It's too soon. Mar . . . tin . . . will . . . leave . . . me . . . after you . . . both . . . get . . . what you . . . evergreen smell . . . winter. . . ." She went under.

"She doesn't really believe that," he told me. "She's depressed." I felt the bite of the needle, and no need to speak.

Staring at the ceiling, I waited for the drug to take hold, dimly aware of the hum made by the equipment that had been moved into Julie's room.

Now Carbone moistened my temples with conducting salve, and placed the electrodes there. Another point of contact was made just above my heart. Julie was identically wired, and the two of us were connected through an electronic pacemaker, heart to heart, brain to brain, again to be one flesh, but this time in the darkness of sleep. Dream sympathy.

Without the pacemaker, I could (and by reflex, would) fight my way to wakefulness through the onslaught of alien dreams. Now



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I would be the prisoner of dreams, held in place by the implacable pulses—tied to Julie's rhythms.

"Try the help signal, Martin."

"I won't leave her, Frank." With the drug, my voice was syrup slow.

"You may need it," he urged.

I reached into my brain for it, the post-hypnotically implanted mental beacon. It was my only escape should things become too threatening. I aimed for Carbone's mind and hurled the signal—my very own personal scream.

"Good lord," he cried. "I've got it. You bet your life I'll disconnect you if you send me *that* again."

Dream sympathy. I wondered if he really knew. I might indeed be betting my life. For Julie.

"I'm pacing you now," he said. "Don't be frightened." His voice came from beyond the reef of consciousness that breaks the tides of our nights and days.

The pacemaker hit with a jolt, joining me to Julie.

One flesh.

I saw us then. She reached for me. The earth fell away between us. "Julie," I cried. "I don't know you," she shouted. A pond of water in the green grass showed my face rippling with the wind. I reached down to touch it and the grass was brown and scorched. My face raised itself up out of the pond, dripping with water, cold and white, eyes blind and empty, bereft of expression. She stood behind me, looking over my shoulder as I looked at me. "This isn't really me," I explained. "It's what I've learned to. . . ."

Then I was assaulted by her naked body, perfect and undiseased. She tore at my flesh to find the nerves that still had feeling. Whose dream? Whose dream? She pressed my skin with her fingers, drawing blood, and it hurt inexpressibly. They held me down, tearing away my clothes, touching the cigarette's glowing coal to the tender pink flesh beneath. . . .

I could see the help signal's friendly glow, like the sun, just over there if I could only reach it. Then it vanished beneath the horizon, and the universe was pearl gray blankness. My torturers were gone. Julie was gone. No—she was in me, part of me, her eyes my eyes, her hands my hands, one flesh, and all her sensations reached up to pull me into . . . THE LIGHT!

Splendid light. Blinding light. I knew now what I had seen in her room, caught up in the nightmare's aftermath. It was not, after all, a memory of the lights I had turned on to still her screaming. It was the light of the eternity wave. She had ridden



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it in her nightmare. She was riding it now. We were there together, swept away. I felt the jolt of the pacemaker, hurting, pulling us even closer together.

We were falling through music, taste, smell, the perfume of the lumps, the essence of something greater. The largeness was a wind. I tried to tack against it, and found that I had no control. I was in the grip of Julie's mind; and she was in the grip of the lumpmind.

I gave over to the light. It was like water on my skin, around me and in my (her) lungs with a pressure that lifted as it pushed, sound that abraded with sweetness, all these and—incredibly—incredible moreness. I let it fill me, reaching within for Julie. There was no Julie. There was something else, unbearably huge, of which she and I were a part. It was joy.

And now I could feel the fragments, the remains of all the human lives gone lumpen. *They* were here, reaching for us, drawing us in, filling us with understanding.

*"There is no end,"* they sang.

There was a subtle change in the wind, and now I could sense dimension, though all directions were one. The eternity wave swelled. We were borne up on it, closer to the shimmering surface of the lumpmind. It stretched before us, covering all the vast and varied terrain of perception—the fleshlessness of mind and the mindlessness of flesh, fused into a pulsating unity of ecstatic purpose. If I looked at it sideways, I could see cells, each large enough to hold a world. If I looked straight on, I saw only—beyond. Colors shattered and fled, reassembled and danced. Oh, Julie, now you know. Look—can you see?

This was a place that was not part of our universe, a time not part of our time. I opened myself to the experience, but it was not mine to have. Julie gave me witness, passing the knowledge through herself to me. I could reach but could not touch. I could see and feel. But I could not be here. I could only be with Julie.

Ages away (and as close as my hand) I could see the tiny hole in the wall of forever where this universe met ours. The eternity wave purled against it, dripping through, sowing seeds of mind that grew into lumps. We were falling, endlessly falling, and the lumpmind was a choir of massed voices, each falling endlessly to become light on the water, part of all the water everywhere.

The pacemaker hit again, hard, vibrating through every pore of my being, pushing Julie deeper into me. The eternity wave rose and fell, pulling us apart. *Julie!* I tried to hold onto her with my mind. The current was too strong. She was growing older,



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wider, deeper, cleaner—as perfect as the lumpmind, every day more a part of it. And when she was ready, she would be part of the sensorium in our space, that felt and loved silently. She would be a lump; but she would be so much more. They were teaching her how.

The eternity wave crested. She was with them now, so big, so intolerably huge, speaking the language of the lump universe. The sound of it was deafening, the emotions white hot. Beneath my joy swelled the certain sorrow that I would never have this. How could I find the tiny rift—how could I know where to be when the eternity wave dripped through? Here, as always, I was apart, now human, now *merely* human, while Julie was growing into something that dwarfed heaven.

And when the pacemaker hit again, it hit me with all she was becoming, the vastness of her fledgling soul, the lightspeed tidal force of the eternity wave. My heart stopped. And started. Another jolt from the pacemaker and I was crushed beneath her, Julie to the trillionth power, centuries of her, more than earth can hold. My heart stopped again, even as I clawed to hold onto her. If I was dying, then let it be so, for there could be nothing to hold me to earth anymore. I saw myself then at her lumpen side, linked to a pale dim memory of all this nameless joy and light, scrounging at her mind for a taste of it until I grew old and died and she went on forever. My heart beat again, and with the resurgence of life came a peculiar thought: could it be enough just to love her? Could anything be that simple? I tried to make sense of it, but just then, the pacemaker hit again and a nova exploded in my chest.

Live or die, Martin? Easy question. The lady or the tiger by the tail? Come on, Martin—you don't have to be right. Just guess! Throw a dart! HELP! Where in eternity was Carbone? HELP! I sent it out, my personal scream, between the beats of my seizing heart. HELP! And the eternity wave foamed, pulling, swirling, tugging at my ankles. I was falling, endlessly falling. Without her.

A heartbeat. Another. How long between beats?

"How long?" My voice was barely there. I could see the tubes running in and out of my arms, into my nose, carrying fluids.

"Dr. Carbone!" someone screamed.

His face looming above me reminded me of something . . . something. . . . Then it all came back, my journey with Julie through the lumpmind, the facts in my mind, evidence for the court. The



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lumps were human—more than human. To destroy them would be a crime.

"Too long," he said. "You've been in a coma."

"How long? We have to . . . ."

"Six weeks, Martin."

"Listen, Frank. The lumps are part of—of—" I groped for words. "They're part of a life form in another continuum. Something of it reaches us through a warp and reproduces itself the best way it can. But the lumps are only partly here. . . . the part we can see and touch is the smallest thing about them . . . out there on the other side, there's so much . . ."

"Rest, Martin. There are no more lumps."

"Where's Julie?" Panic ripped the thin fabric of my voice.

"In her room. She's very low. Martin—she watched us carry them out to the crematorium. She insisted."

"I have to see her."

"You can't even walk, Martin. You almost died."

"I have to see her soon."

"Soon," he said. I slept then. I dreamed silence.

It was soon. Out of the grip of the coma, beyond the reach of the eternity wave, my body picked up its natural rhythms. My heart was undamaged.

I stood in the doorway, quietly staring. She felt me there and looked away.

"Are you happy now?" she demanded.

Six weeks had been cruel. Her cheeks had fallen in. Her eyes were almost transparent. She was nearly blind.

"I told you I wasn't leaving."

"I don't care anymore. There's not enough of me left to care."

"But you saw, Julie. You know what's out there. You're not dying. You're on your way to something beautiful—and we barely touched the surface."

"You're lying. The air stinks with lies. Open the window. I can't breathe."

The air in her room was tactile with the lump perfume. I opened the window, letting in the noise of the traffic and all the spoiled acrid air of the world below. "You know I'm not lying. You were there. You saw."

"I don't remember anything," she rasped. "I don't know a thing about it. All I know is you went into my brain and took what you needed. . . ."

"Julie."



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". . . and left me here to turn into . . ."

"I came back, Julie—I'm here."

"You went away! You let them kill my babies!"

"That will stop. We can tell the court what we've learned."

"They'll burn me—you'll see. But what's it gonna matter? I can't see. I can't take more than five steps without the damned crutches. I'm . . . ."

"Tired," I told her. "Rest."

"Soon not even five steps."

"Soon much more," I promised.

"Don't lie to me. It's just another drug, lying."

"I promise, it's the truth."

She lay still on the bed, her eyes gazing up into nothingness.

"Julie—for a little while—we had it, didn't we?"

"You left."

"Julie?"

"Whatever it is, it's a lie," she said. "Whatever it was, it wasn't."

"I'll come see you later," I said at the door. I dipped into her then, but everything was tangled, hurting, fatigued beyond endurance. She seemed to be shrinking before my eyes. If you looked fast, you could not even see the woman there on the bed, so small had she become.

But this was only today, I told myself, as I stepped out into the corridor. This was only the beginning. Tomorrow, not far away, she would stretch the length and breadth of the eternity wave. Tomorrow, there would be no crutches. Tomorrow, five steps would be a joke.

I froze. Turned. Screamed. A shadow in her mind stepped out into the light. I should have caught it earlier. I should have.

It was three small steps from the bed to the window.

"Julie!"

*Who could remember her face? The skin and bone, and encroaching lump tissue were pressed together, broken; she had nearly snapped in two.*

*"Come away, Martin."*

*"It can't all be gone so fast," I choked. "There must be something there."*

*"It's over, Martin."*

*"One more minute," I begged. He stood there, waiting.*

"JULIE!"

*Silence. I turned away. Goodbye.*

*"It hurts, Frank. It hurts to be human. I'm going to stop."*



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*"No," he said, holding open the door.*

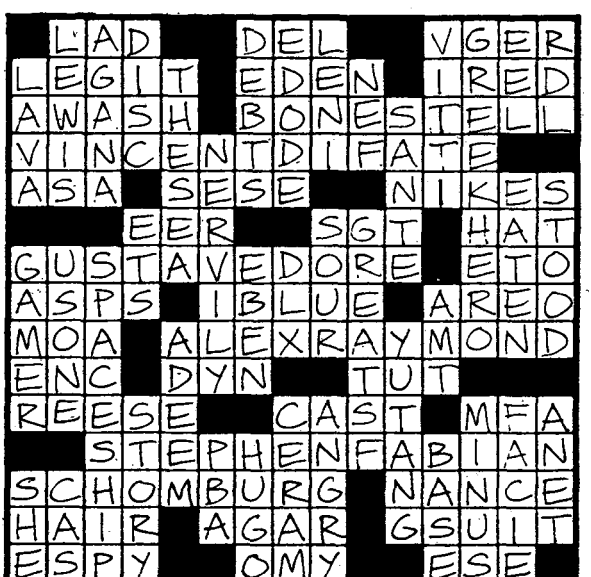
*No.*

*Poor Ferdie. What I could tell him now. I looked at Julie, then away. I walked through the door, into the water, the vastness of the water, to catch my wave and ride it to wherever it went. We start insane, for there's no other way. We swim in circles, banging our snouts until they bleed. We keep on swimming, for there is no other way, and the hurt never goes away. But the circles do get bigger.* ●

## IAsfm Puzzle #10,

From page 25

# SOLUTION TO ILLUSTRATED MEN

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# ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

In the past five years, the two works of science fiction that have probably interested me most have been Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun* and Julian May's *Saga of Pliocene Exile.* They are extraordinarily different—one in essence a triumph of style, the other a cornucopia of content—and yet they share at least one attribute. Both have appeared in periodic volumes, but cannot correctly be called series since both are ongoing narratives. The May comes to a demi-climax at the end of each book; the Wolfe seems to all but break off in mid-sentence at the intervals.

This makes them progressively more difficult to write about as the volumes appear, because what one is reviewing is only the part of a whole; ideally one should wait until each is concluded and then tackle the entirety, but if for no other reason, the conscientious reviewer owes it to his readers to alert them to such splendid stuff as it happens rather than waiting the several years to assess the whole thing. Perhaps there in a nutshell is the eternally debated difference between the critic and the reviewer; the reviewer must always keep his journalistic duties in mind while the critic can take the leisure to wait.

The reader, too, would have benefited by gathering all the volumes before indulging, but to do so would certainly necessitate being Job-related. For those who have not yet begun either work but may be moved to do so, this is a good time to begin one of them. *The Book of the New Sun* has, in the recently-released fourth volume, reached a conclusion; as I understand it, there will be another volume that is not a direct continuation of the story. (The titles are *The Shadow of the Torturer, The Claw of the Conciliator, The Sword of the Lictor*, and the latest, *The Citadel of the Autarch.* The May *Saga* is so far *The Many-Colored Land, The Golden Torc*, and the new *The Nonborn King.*)

Needless to say, it is most intimidating to have a volume of each arrive at the same time. However, true to the Critics' (or Reviewers') Creed, we clench



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our teeth and report. The foregoing was what could be said about both novels; individually . . .

**The Citadel of the Autarch**
By Gene Wolfe
Timescape Books, $15.95

So we reach the end of the story of the wanderings of Severian, the torturer, member of the Guild for Seekers of Truth and Penitence, across the landscape of an Earth of a future so far distant that our time is less known than the time of Menes is known to us. His phantasmagorical adventures and encounters continue through most of this volume. He becomes involved in the war between the forces of the Autarch of Severian's Commonwealth (vaguely in what we know as South America) and the Ascians of the North, that war which until now has been only a rumor in the distance.

He meets a hermit, in reality an observer from another time, the levels of whose house rise through different periods of the future. He reencounters old friends and enemies from his travels, and returns the miraculous Claw of the Conciliator to the mysterious order of the Pelerines from whom he acquired it by accident (but was it the real Claw?). He is wounded and rescued by the Autarch himself, riding the beast called Mammoth.

As you can see, the invention is as dizzying and prolific as in the earlier volumes. But here, finally, in the new encounter with the Autarch, the revelations come. The major one I certainly won't reveal, but it may not be that much of a surprise to the careful reader. And, in the process, most of the mysterious events and people of the tetralogy are explained and rationalized; I certainly won't say *all*—that sweeping a statement will have to await a rereading . . .

. . . As will a final assessment. *The Book of the New Sun* is too complex and oblique a work to evaluate on one reading. It will undoubtedly be considered a landmark in the field, one that perhaps marks the turning point of science fiction from content to style, from matter to manner. Mannered it certainly is, *and* stylish; under that glittering edifice of surprising words and more surprising events and characters, is there a story or a concept of any stature?

I'm not saying there isn't; I'm merely raising the question. This is certainly the sort of novel that will provide a field day for critics, essayists, people who make lists, analyzers, and academics—oh, Lord, will the academics have a field day with it! But the popularity of the first three volumes has certainly proved it to have some-



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thing that also captures the general reader.

My own immediate reaction is a simple one. On looking back through *The Book of the New Sun*, I have been dazzled, intrigued, excited, amused, delighted, bewildered, awestruck, and captivated. There is one thing, though, that I haven't been, and that was moved.

### The Nonborn King

By Julian May

Houghton Mifflin, $16.95

Most readers know by this time that the major premise of Julian May's epic *Saga of Pliocene Exile* is that in a Utopic future, harmoniously intertwined with other interstellar cultures, a sort of time gate is found that leads—one way only—to Earth's Pliocene age, the period when intelligence is just evolving in primates.

Thousands of malcontent humans take advantage of the gate to escape a universe with which they can't cope, but in the Pliocene they find, not the primitive world they are expecting, but a complex and fantastic civilization of fugitive aliens, a dimorphic race consisting of the beautiful and godlike Tanu and the smaller, mutable Firvulag. Both branches of the race have varied psi powers, which they have used to create a culture that prereflects the wonders and splendors of Celtic mythology.

So far, we have followed the adventures of a group of eight humans as they returned to the Pliocene. Three of them have exceptional psi powers of their own, and rapidly achieve high status in the various factions that make up the strife-ridden "Many-Colored Land," as the Tanu call Pliocene Europe. One of them, the mad warrior woman, Felice, unlooses a catastrophe of monumental proportions on Tanu and Firvulag alike.

The third volume, *The Nonborn King*, deals mostly with the power struggle that occurs after the catastrophe, as the already fragmented society fragments further. The Tanu divide into those wanting to regroup under the heir, the Battlemaster Nodonn, leader of the Host of Nontusvel; a group devoted to conciliation under Minanonn, the Heretic (are these names ringing bells, mythology buffs?); and those willing to follow Aiken Drum, the human who has declared himself King of the Many-Colored Land. Then there are the Firvulag, the Little People, and the Howlers, mutant Firvulag of monstrous aspect who hide their ugliness by shape changing. There are the human Lowlives, who had escaped from the benign slavery of the Tanu, as well as humans allied to the



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other factions, and the individual human powers: Aiken Drum, the insane Felice, and Elizabeth, the master metapsychic.

And trust Ms. May not to let things rest; a whole *new* element is introduced from the future's past (no, I'm not going to explain that), that hints at elements of Norse/Germanic myth.

As is obvious, the only word is "epic." Somehow May keeps broadening her canvas into a vast panorama, with more and more elements and more and more characters, and keeps the balls in the air—and not just any old way, but weaving intricate but coherent patterns. (I think I mixed a metaphor there, but just one won't do for this mammoth creation.)

Again, an accurate appraisal will have to wait for the work's completion. But I will voice one reservation here and now. The author has chosen to incorporate a realism bordering on vulgarity that is becoming more prominent as the story proceeds. There was barely a hint of it in the first volume; in the second the frequency increased, and in *The Nonborn King* it is close to the prevailing tone. For me, this undermines the power and beauty I felt inherent in the opening of the story; even the divine Tanu are a little too raunchily human at times.

But there are still a plentitude of moments of power and beauty—*and* hair-raising excitement. It seems obvious that the author is out to incorporate *everything* into this novel; she seems well on the way to succeeding.

**The Umbral Anthology of Science Fiction Poetry**
Edited by Steve Rasnic Tem
Umbral Press, $4.50 (paper)

Poetry is not one of the arts in which I can claim any special expertise, therefore I hardly feel qualified to pass any sort of judgement on the contents of *The Umbral Anthology of Science Fiction Poetry* edited by Steve Rasnic Tem. Nevertheless, such a collection is so rare (former such can be counted on the fingers of one hand) that its publication should certainly be noted, and some information about it provided.

The collection is in five sections, the first four devoted to poems by D.M. Thomas, Sonya Dorman, Tom Disch, and Dick Allen, respectively, the fifth to a variety of writers among whom are Brian Aldiss, Ray Bradbury, Michael Bishop, and Marge Piercy.

My own feeling, given as an outsider, is that science fiction is so strongly narrative and reliant on complex concepts better conveyed in prose that it and the art of poetry are at best uneasy bedfellows. The poet can indeed play with these concepts once they're established, but that makes the work some-



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thing of a secondhand creative effort. But that opinion is thrown out more for the sake of argument than as a firmly held dictum. I would be curious, though, to see how well a long narrative poem in the style of the 19th century could carry a science fictional theme. There is none such in the current collection.

It will, though, be a feast for those interested in the state of this fairly esoteric art. It's a non-profit project partially financed by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and might be difficult to find, so let's note that it can be ordered from Steve Rasnic Tem, 2330 Irving St., Denver, Colo. 80211, at $4.50 plus .75 postage and handling. Checks should be made out to Steve Rasnic Tem.

**Watch the North Wind Rise**
By Robert Graves
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
$7.95 (paper)
**Hercules, My Shipmate**
By Robert Graves
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
$8.95 (paper)

Those who came to Robert Graves' work through the television *I, Claudius* may not know his other novels which have been unavailable in this country for some time, and even if they do, may think of his fiction as only historical. This situation has been remedied, thank goodness, by the republication of his major fantasy and his only work of science fiction.

The latter is a very strange work indeed, as you might expect; published in England as *Seven Days in New Crete*, the American title is *Watch the North Wind Rise* (for once, an improvement). Despite Graves' reputation as an esoteric poet and mythographer, it's one of the wittiest, most charming, and accessible looks at the future I know of, as well as being totally unlike any other.

Graves uses the standard mainstream writer's device of the observer from the present being transported into the future; he becomes involved in events there, while his views and comments provide an objectively satirical look at our own era. This tired framework becomes something else from Graves; the future culture is absolutely fascinating, and though it's close to Utopic, the rather jaundiced view of Edward, the man from our time, is as wickedly funny towards it as towards our own messy period.

New Crete developed from what was basically an experimental historical reserve established by a desperate technological civilization in our not too distant future searching for cultural alternatives that might save the planet. An "Anthropological Council" created a rigidly controlled Bronze Age



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enclave along Minoan lines; it worked so well that when the rest of civilization collapsed into savagery, it survived and prospered.

The new Cretan culture is determinedly nontechnological, and also without an economic system (Graves somehow makes this seem possible). It has a rigid caste system (the five castes are servants, captains, recorders, commons and magicians) and is totally devoted to the worship of the Mother Goddess, the female deity of prehistoric times with whom Graves is so preoccupied (*The White Goddess* et al.); needless to say, it's a matriarchy.

The Goddess is very present, and has, in fact, had Edward brought forward for Her own reasons. She tends to turn up as a crane or alternatively, in the person of Erica, a completely amoral former lover of Edward's who looks like Marlene Dietrich, whose presence in the future throws him completely until he realizes who it is.

If all this sounds fairly mad, it is; but somehow Graves has managed to transcend satire and social significance to create a unique three-dimensional society that rings true while still incorporating incarnate deities and magic. It's quite an achievement, and I return to it periodically with undiminished delight.

*Hercules, My Shipmate* is so different in style that it could well have come from another writer entirely. It is the epic myth of the Argosy (the Golden Fleece and all that), retold in a stylized, *faux naive* manner that makes for hard going at times. Graves seems determined to work in every obscure Greek myth ever unearthed as well as every legendary tribe that welcomed or harassed the Argonauts between Iolcos and Colchis. And his evocation of the cast is hardly heroic—Jason is a self-serving egotist, Hercules a destructive oaf, Medea an indecisive twit. Only Orpheus seems worthy of any sympathy at all.

The major conflict is between the new-comer worshipers of the patriarchal Olympians, and the old inhabitant adherents of the Goddess, who is still on hand in person stirring up trouble for her usurping son Jupiter. The voyage to regain the Fleece is part of this complex power struggle, and while making clear that the supernatural level of the story is quite real, Graves provides some intriguing natural explanations for some of the more fantastic elements of the legend.

*Hercules, My Shipmate* is nowhere near as delightful and involving as *Watch the North Wind Rise*, but it's as inventive



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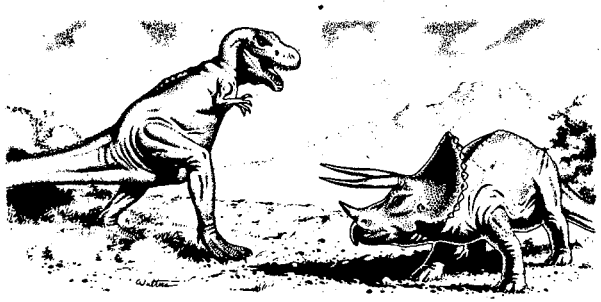
with the past as the other is with the future, and particularly those who enjoy knowledgeable variations on Greek legend will find it worth the effort.

A recent publication by one connected with this magazine is *Isaac Asimov Presents the Best Fantasy of the 19th Century* edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh and Martin Greenberg, Beaufort Books, $15.95.

Books to be considered for review in this column should be sent to Baird Searles, %The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10014. ●



## NEXT ISSUE

The June *IAsfm* cover story, "The High Test," by Frederik Pohl, was written on Doc E. E. Smith's typewriter and follows, both with humor and excitement, in that tradition. This issue will also present an intriguing short story, "Perchance to Dream," by Norman Spinrad and we'll have a fascinating article by neurobiologist Tom Rainbow on "The Feasibility of Mind-Transfer" and the amazing possibilities it may hold for us. Exciting stories by Sydney J. Van Scyoc, Pat Cadigan and others are in this issue too so pick up your copy, on sale May 10, 1983.



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There's a chance coming up soon to meet the Good Doctor, so make plans soon for a social weekend with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send a #10 SASE when writing cons. When calling cons, give your name and reason for calling right away. Look for me at cons behind the iridescent Filthy Pierre badge, making music.

## APRIL, 1983

15–16—**MunchCon.** For info, write: **MUSFS, Mem. Stud. Ctr., Marshall U., Huntington WV 25701.** Or phone: **(703) 273–6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Huntington WV (if city omitted, same as in address) at Marshall University. Guests will include: Nancy Springer.

20–26—**Festival de la SF, B. P. 4046, Metz, Cedex 57040, France.** Municipally-sponsored SF festival.

22–24—**Pendulum, Box 4097 Sta. C, Ottawa ON K1Y 4P3, Canada.** C. J. Cherryh, Robert Asprin, Lynn Abbey, Kennedy Poyser, Robert Holmes. PBS-TV's Dr. Who emphasized.

22–24—**Contretemps, Box 12422, Omaha NE 68112.** Gordon R. (Dorsai) Dickson, Gay & Joe Haldeman, fan Rusty Hevelin. Masquerade. Medieval combat, etc., demonstration by local SCA.

23—**HumaniCon, c/o Morrison, 20A Gordon Dr., Londonderry NH 03053.** Salem NH. Fred Pohl.

29–May1—**TreasureCon, 2516 1st Av. N., Billings MT 59101. (406) 252–4398.** C. J. ("Downbelow Station") Cherryh, Robert Asprin, Steve Jackson. Costumes. 24-hour party room.

29–May 1—**Kubla Khan, 647 Devon Dr., Nashville TN 37220. (615) 832–8402.** Peter ("Ghost Story") Straub, Andrew J. Offutt artist Richard Powers. Costumes, amateur film/video contest.

## MAY, 1983

6–8—**ICon, c/o SF Forum, Box 564, Stony Brook NY 11790.** I*S*A*A*C A*S*I*M*O*V, Janet O. Jeppson (Mrs. Isaac Asimov). Not connected with the ICon in Iowa. A chance to meet the Good Doctor.

6–8—**Colorado Mountain Con, c/o Gardner, CMC, Timberline Campus, Leadville CO 80461. (303) 486–2016.** Stephen R. Donaldson, Ed Bryant, R. & M. Musgrave, F. Mayer, D. Murdock, C. Willis.

6–8—**CampCon, c/o Poe, Box 26453, Ft. Worth TX 76116.** Wichita Falls TX. $50 membership includes all meals, bunkhouse bunk. Robert Asprin, Lynn Abbey. "Relax in intimate woodlands."

13–15—**MarCon, Box 2583, Columbus OH 43216. (614) 497–9953.** James P. Hogan. George (Lan) Laskowski. Fri. Masquerade. This con has a reputation for good parties and songfests.

## JUNE, 1983

3–5—**DeepSouthCon, Box 16140, Knoxville TN 37996.** Stephen King, K. Wagner, C. Yarbro, D. Chaffee.

## SEPTEMBER, 1983

1–5—**ConStellation, Box 1046, Baltimore MD 21203.** John (Zanzibar) Brunner, David (Lensman) Kyle, Jack (Well of Souls) Chalker. The 1983 WorldCon. Go to smaller cons if you can to prepare.

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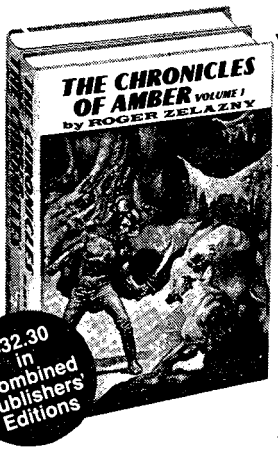


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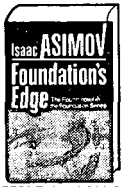


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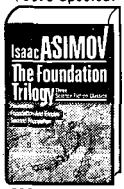


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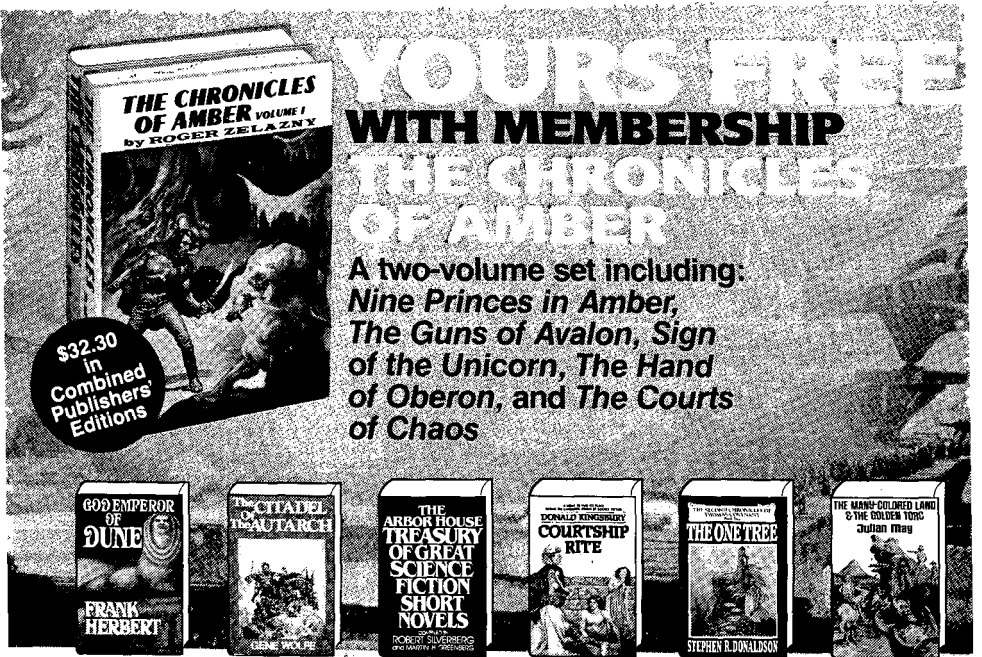


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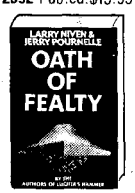


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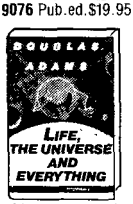


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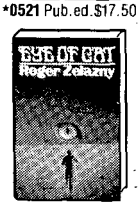


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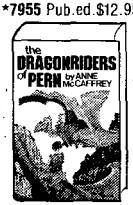


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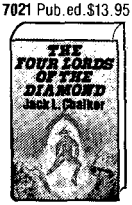


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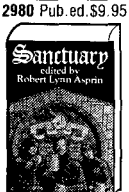


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